

In London Town



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IN LONDON TOWN.

IN LONDON TOWN.

A Novel.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

“A WESTERN WILDFLOWER,” “IN THE ALSATIAN MOUNTAINS,” ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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IN LONDON TOWN.

CHAPTER I.

THAT night Fiametta was very ill, so ill that Miss Hatchard sent for a doctor. She had waited until long after David's usual hour for returning before she did so, for she wanted his advice as to whom to send for, but no David came. With a charming absence of conformity to any fixed principles, David's telegrams, sent from Westminster to Bloomsbury, took rather longer to get themselves delivered than if he had sent them to New York.

So Miss Hatchard waited and fumed; and the Fowlers went to the pit of a

theatre, by desire of "Frederick," who considered that his little wife was unduly fretting herself over Fiametta's troubles, and laudably wished to raise her spirits. Miss Hatchard being thus driven to rely upon her own resources, sent Sarah Ann for the nearest doctor, and that happening to be a parish one, he came readily enough, any sort of private patient being welcome to him. He was a coarse, vulgar-looking man, with long white teeth, and dyed whiskers, and a flashy breast pin—a doctor of the very lowest order of doctors. He made some coarse remark about the girl's beauty, and spoke in an offensively familiar way to Miss Hatchard, that raised an amiable wish in that worthy soul's breast to throw hot water over him; but she suppressed it, although the kettle was handy, and tried to keep him to the matter in hand. But whether he was ignorant, or reticent, he certainly gave as little information as

possible about the girl's state, and extracted all the details about her that he could from Miss Hatchard ; then he went away, and said he would call again to-morrow.

Miss Hatchard did all she could for the girl—bathed her burning head, and tried to assuage her thirst. She had put her into her own bed, and she sat beside her, like the good creature that she was, without fire on that cold evening, because the sick girl was to be kept as cool as possible.

How anxiously she listened and waited for David, or the visitor of the morning. She was half afraid that the latter would never come again, that the girl's words had shocked him too deeply. But she wronged him by the doubt ; for he did come, and stayed long with her, sat by the girl's bed, and bathed her forehead, and listened to all that Miss Hatchard could tell him of the troubled life that

seemed passing by a troublous and stormy passage from among them.

“She must be taken away before she gets any worse,” he said. “She has brain fever coming on, and she will be worse in a few days than she is now. Perfect quiet and good air are what she needs. She cannot get either here.”

“Right you are there,” said Miss Hatchard, sympathizingly. “For, what with the children, and the carts, and the costers, and the hand-orgins, and the smuts, and the fogs, there ain’t no quiet, nor much *hair*, to be got ’ere.”

“I believe it will be less dangerous to move her than to keep her here. I will have an invalid carriage brought to the door early in the morning, before the streets are crowded—say at five o’clock—and then we will take her down slowly. It is only thirty miles, and we can do it easily in six hours, going slowly.”

“It do go to my very heart to part

with her," said Miss Hatchard, beginning to cry; "but I know it is for her good. Lor, to think of how her poor par looked upon you as the awfulest of heirs, and you so kind all the time!"

"I blame myself very much," he replied, "that I never tried to find out what had become of my cousin. In point of fact, I have never thought of him for years. I had an idea, I don't know why, that he went to Italy with his wife after he lost his money, and that she was a woman of fortune. I might have helped him in many ways, if he had only let me know his distresses."

"But are you really the heir?" asked Miss Hatchard, dubiously.

"I believe the property is rightly mine, most certainly. I shall, when I have got this poor girl safely away, go to the British Museum and ask to see the paper to which my poor cousin attached so much importance. But even if it does prove

that old Sir John Thorold had a son, and that my cousin can trace his descent back to him, it will not affect the disposition of the property, but only the baronetcy, and that has been in abeyance, or really probably extinct, for three generations."

"Lor, now!" said Miss Hatchard, opening her eyes very wide; "and to think now of that poor old gentleman worritin' hisself to death for nothing."

"His losses and his wife's death must have affected his mind," said Mr. Thorold, sadly. "Poor fellow! I remember him as a bright, enthusiastic young man. We were good friends once, and there was never even a question about my right to the property then. This idea must have come after his losses. But about this poor girl, Miss Hatchard? Shall I be in your way if I stay here with her?"

"I'm a going to sit up with her," said Miss Hatchard, stoutly. "You jes go and get a nap; I'm all right."

“But you were up last night and the night before.”

“Lor, that ain’t nothin’. Many’s the night as I’ve sat up to work; and I slep’ most of the day yesterday. Besides,” added the little woman, beginning to cry again, “ain’t she going away from me to be a grand lady, and I shan’t never see her no more?”

“It will not be my fault if that is the case,” said her visitor, kindly; “and I do not believe that my cousin will ever forget one who has been her truest friend. Besides, Miss Hatchard”—and he looked round the room with a smile—“I should like my girls’ portraits to be painted, as you have done their cousin’s;” and he looked at Fiametta’s picture on the wall.

“Oh dear! you are real kind, you are,” said Miss Hatchard, with a smile and a sob appearing simultaneously. “If that ain’t the second real good order

in two months. Lor, I am gettin' on now ! ”

“ I am sure you deserve to,” said Mr. Thorold, shaking hands with her. “ I will send a nurse here early to help you dress her, and she will take her down with me. Good-bye. I shall see you again, then. Stay ! Would you like me to send the nurse to-night ? ”

“ Oh, Lor, no ; I don't want no strange nusses ! ” cried Miss Hatchard, with a lively remembrance of the “ monthlies,” several of whose portly forms resided in Harcourt Street. “ No, no strange nusses for me. I can manage the poor dear—and the last night, too ! ”

And so Mr. Thorold departed.

He had only just gone, when David's telegram was brought. Miss Hatchard read it in some surprise.

“ Well, I shouldn't have thought it of him,” she mused. “ Gone off, and never a word, and this poor dear like this. He

don't want no trouble with sickness ; yet I shouldn't have thought it of him neither. ' Called away suddenly to Broodleigh.' Oh yes, I dessay, called away to *her* ;" and she jerked her head towards the smiling Fanny on canvas. " Yes, you may smirk," she apostrophized her own handiwork, " smirk so much as ever you mind to ; but ye ain't worth a farthin' compared to her, with all your money."

A sudden thought struck her, and she stopped.

" Fiametta will have some money, too, I reckon, now," she went on. " Oh, he is a good one, that *heir* ! Treated as his own daughter, he said she should be ; and only a third cousin, after all ! She will be a lady indeed now, and he will be dawdling about after her, perhaps thinking she have come into the fortune her par talked of ; and then perhaps he will find out as her cousin don't settle nothin'

upon her—he might not have meant that; it couldn't be hardly expected—and perhaps he will go and break her heart, like—— No, no, young man; you don't do that. You had better marry *her*, the rich one, as I've no doubt you have engaged yourself solemn to do, and leave my pretty dear alone."

What was the reason of Miss Hatchard's dislike to David? She had liked him well enough at first, had, in fact, rather taken a fancy to him, until that evening in the summer when she had seen something in his face unnoticed by her before.

Miss Hatchard had once had a sister. The story is a very old one, and a very common one. The sister was a beauty. Miss Hatchard was the elder, and a plain woman. She idolized her pretty sister, treated her as a superior being, waited upon her hand and foot, spent every spare penny she could get on adornments

for her—helped to make her, in fact, the wilful spoilt child she was.

Their father was a small tradesman. He kept a little news shop, where fancy articles and a few cheap toys were dispersed in the window, and piles of newspapers graced the doorway, and cheap periodicals were handed over the counter. It was not a very lucrative business, neither was he a good man of business. The trade of a small newspaper vendor and fancy stationer does not present a very alluring aspect to a keen-witted business man. Mr. Hatchard was a quite man, and a slow man, much addicted to a long pipe, and a certain “public” round the corner, which he supplied with papers. He liked discussing the contents of the papers there in a slow and impressive manner, and gave his opinions thereupon as a man of weight—a man who had all contemporary literature as it were under his thumb.

Under these circumstances it is not difficult to believe that a good share of the responsibility of the shop and its management fell upon Mrs. Hatchard, who was a busy, bustling, striving little woman. Maria, the elder girl, was apprenticed to a working designer; and Annie, the younger, was kept at home to "mind the shop;" so the two girls did not see very much of each other, except in the evenings, and not very much then, for Maria was often kept late at her work. When Annie was about seventeen, and at the height of her bright girlish beauty, a change seemed to come over her. She was sometimes unnaturally gay, at others crying for no reason that could be discovered. Maria was working very busily just then to get a certificate for freehand drawing, and all her evenings were occupied; and as Annie must have fresh air, she went out without her.

The end came very suddenly upon

these worthy folks—the quiet slow father, the busy-bustling mother, the plain industrious sister. Annie was gone. That was all they knew. Gone, without a word or a sign. Pretty girls do not generally run away from kind homes by themselves; but neither old Mr. Hatchard nor his wife lived to know who had destroyed their darling. They both drooped quietly, one after the other; the busy mother first, then the father. Maria buried them both within ten months; and as the business had gone too, she sold what little stock was left, and most of the furniture, and, her term of apprenticeship being out, tried to support herself with her pencil, and seek for her lost sister.

She found no trace of her for years. At last, in the Strand, as she was returning from some business rather late one night, she saw under an archway a wretched creature being dragged up from the ground by a policeman. She knew

the face at once, though sin and sorrow and drink had made its beauty a thing of the past.

She ran forward and held the drunken, muddy head against her bosom, and sobbed over it with the joy and thankfulness with which a girl might greet a lover's return.

"Leave her to me," she had said to the policeman. "She is my sister. Oh, help me to get her away!"

"Well, this ain't the first nor second time as I've took her in this way. If you like to engage as it shall be the last, I don't mind letting her off. Such cases ain't no credit nor pleasure to nobody."

"Yes, yes, yes," said Miss Hatchard; "she will come home with me. Help me, get me a cab—anything!"

And the poor creature woke out of her sleep to find herself in her sister's arms.

There is no need to tell too minutely what followed. The tears and joy and

sorrow, the long tale of misplaced love and confidence, the heartless seduction, and the bitter awakening and forsaking that came afterwards. Poor Annie, fallen to woman's lowest depth though she was, was yet loyal in one thing—she would never tell her lover's name. It was the one little vestige of the loving girl left in her, for Annie had sunk low indeed; her sister respected it, and never sought to force her confidence. But she had a locket, a cheap little worthless thing that she had believed to be pure gold, as she had believed her lover's love to be when it was given her. It held a scrap of hair—bright brown curling hair—and a photograph with the letters "D. E." under it.

"That was he," Annie had said, "and those were his initials;" but beyond this she never went.

She lived for some years, a broken-down, weak woman, unable to do any-

thing but cry over her troubles, and moan that her sister kept her one comfort from her. Sometimes, when she was a little stronger, she would get it in spite of Maria's watchfulness. She would even pawn her sister's half completed pictures for a few pence, and spend them in gin, and be found by Maria, when she came back from her hurried visits to the firm she worked for, speechless upon the floor. Miss Hatchard had a terrible life for those few years, until at last the poor weak creature died, and her burden was lifted from her.

She had not felt it as a burden; she grieved as much over her poor Annie's death as if she had been in the first flower of her youth and beauty. She was a lonely woman. For Annie's sake she had dropped all her old associates, lest they should wound her sister with their words, or see her in one of her drunken fits; and now she had no heart

to make any new friends, even if she had the time, for much of her connection had been lost, as she nursed her sister in her last illness; and times were very hard indeed for Miss Hatchard, saddled with debts to doctors and tradespeople, for poor Annie had been allowed to want for nothing.

She had kept the locket hidden away in a box for years, and had not given a thought to it, till something in the expression of David's face as he sat looking at Fiametta in her window recalled it to her mind in an instant. When they had both gone away, she took it out and looked long at it. There were the same features, the same waving dark hair, the same everything, except the expression; but she had caught that expression once, and it was enough.

She held it up to the light and examined it. The place had been scratched with a knife after the letter "E." Was it possible

that the name had once been written in full? She examined it minutely. There was certainly an upward stroke that looked like a *t* at the end; and by dint of rubbing and close examination, she was enabled to make enough of the letters left to feel sure that the name was Everest.

She took the first opportunity she could get to ask David what his father's name was. "David," he had answered.

From other inquiries, made apparently without much object in them, she learned that Colonel Everest had been in London in the very year in which her Annie had disappeared. She no longer entertained any doubt as to his being the man who had ruined her sister, and a great and bitter anger rose up in her heart against David. In the most unreasoning manner she judged the son by the father, and from that time believed unhesitatingly that David's friendship with Fiametta was instigated by the worst possible

motives. She did everything she could to keep the girl away from him, but she could do very little, for Fiametta was not a girl easily controlled by any one.

Now as she sat beside the girl's bed, and thought of all that had passed—her Annie's broken life, and the attention that David had paid Fiametta—and then considered the girl's altered circumstances, she framed a strong resolve within herself that in one way or another she would break that connection. David's telegram seemed put into her hands on purpose to carry out her design. He would be away when Fiametta left Harcourt Street. There was no reason why he should ever know where she had gone.





CHAPTER II.

LIFE at Broodleigh Rectory flowed on evenly enough, although the rector lay dying in his bed. Mrs. Everest was not the woman to let the household be upset because her brother was ill. The servants were all marshalled into prayers morning and evening with the same, or even greater, regularity than before, for poor Mr. Burney had never been able to attain to his sister's standard of punctuality. Meals were served at the same hours. The daily service in the church was performed by a needy curate, hunted up by Mrs. Everest herself, from Exeter. Fanny had her walks and drives, her practising

and fancy work. Very little was altered in the household, and that little chiefly concerned David.

David absolutely refused to leave his uncle, except for his meals. There was a good nurse hired for him, for Mrs. Everest was not the woman to neglect her duty towards the sick ; but her office was reduced to a short time of night-watching, for nobody wanted her in the sick room in the daytime ; David and his uncle only desired to be left alone.

It was in vain that Mrs. Everest called for him to go for walks with Fanny, or to drive herself, or even to go out for his own sake. David was as obstinate as she was, and at last flatly refused, after evasions and excuses had failed. He would go out in the garden for a pipe after dinner, and that was all he would do.

“You are throwing away the health and strength that God gave you,” she said severely, when he had refused to

listen to the assurance that walking was good for him.

“If I am, I am bestowing it on one of the best of His productions,” said David. “Besides, nonsense, mother, you know how short a time I have to stay with him, and I don’t suppose I shall be able to get any extra leave.”

“Your uncle may last for years,” she answered.

“God grant it!” he replied. “I only wish that I had done as he would have liked, and gone into Orders, for then I might be his curate.”

“It was what *I* asked you to do,” she said angrily; “but, there, my wishes never went for anything with you! At least,” she added, in a softer voice, thinking of her one great wish, “let me hope, David, that you will do something to please your poor mother before she dies. It will be a grievous reflection for you, David, when I am gone, if you are

unable to think that you gratified one of my desires for your happiness. Ah! how often have I regretted that I would not allow your poor dear father to wear waxed ends to his moustache when we were in Paris! He liked waxed ends, but I never could bear them; they were so French. You will be sorry you have not tried to please me more, David, when I am on my death-bed."

"My dear mother, I do all I can to please you," said David, rather bewildered by his mother's speech, and remembering his Civil Service appointment.

"Yes, my dear boy," she said, and she kissed him on the forehead, in what was for her a wonderful transport of affection, "I believe you will. See, there is dear Fanny with some flowers for your uncle—the last rose, I believe. How thoughtful she is!"

"So she is," said David, pleased for once to be able to agree with his mother,

and supposing that her embrace proceeded from some natural softening of the heart because of her brother's illness.

David always, so to say, gave his mother the benefit of any doubt that could reasonably be entertained as to the motives for her conduct. He was more than ever inclined now to make the best that could be made of her when his uncle would soon be to him but a memory—the sweetest and best memory of his life, but a memory only.

Fanny went with him upstairs, with her bunch of autumn flowers in her hand. Autumn lingers long in those southern counties of England, and chrysanthemums and roses will flower in sheltered gardens until Christmas.

Old Mr. Burney was not particularly fond of flowers. It is not known that he ever noticed that there were such things, except, perhaps, in the illuminated pages of a missal. Probably he did know a rose

from a fuschia—most men, even scholars, do—but beyond this his knowledge certainly did not go; so what pleasure he was to derive from a bunch of flowers in his bedroom, it would be difficult to say. David decided that he must consider Fanny's motive, and ignore the utility of the offering, a principle that is much commended in many religions.

She did not go in. Mrs. Everest had thought it "better not." So Fanny stood outside, and uttered a few commonplace sentiments of hopes and fears relative to Mr. Burney's health in her clear, well-modulated voice, and then went down into the drawing-room, while David carried her posy into the sick room. "She is a dear girl!" murmured the old man, "a very thoughtful, sweet girl. She will make a good wife, Davie."

"Yes," said David, feeling a sudden desire to toss the bouquet into the fire—

“yes; she is a very good sort. Would you like me to read to you now, uncle?”

“Presently, my dear lad, presently. Put the poor little flowers down gently, Davie; it was thoughtful of the dear girl to gather them for me. My kindest love to her, when you go down.”

David stuck the bouquet into the top of the water-bottle, where it looked like some “specimens” at a horticultural show; and then seated himself by his uncle’s bedside, with an uncomfortable feeling that somehow his uncle was going to continue a conversation that was distasteful to him.

“It grieves me,” the old man went on, “Davie, that I have not been able to fulfil my term of guardianship to the dear girl until she is of age. It wants four months to that. Your mother thinks that she had better go and live at the Hall with some elderly lady, who could

chaperone her. I think so, too, and I want you to write to George Betterton about it; but it will be a lonely life for a young girl, Davie."

"She will probably marry," said David, feeling suddenly very cold.

He felt that he could not bear it, if his old uncle should speak to him as his mother had spoken. He knew that if he did so his fate was sealed. It was not in David to refuse to, if needs be, sacrifice his whole life for the peace of mind of his dying uncle. And to marry Fanny could scarcely be called a great sacrifice, upon the whole; yet he felt at that moment a stronger repugnance to doing so than he had ever considered possible before. Events are apt to show themselves in wonderfully clear colour and right proportions in the light of a sick room. David knew that if his uncle even expressed a wish upon the subject, he should marry Fanny, and he also

knew that he should be very miserable afterwards.

But old Mr. Burney was not thinking of ordering any man's life. Good, simple soul, it was the very last wish he had. Nothing was further from his thoughts than to impress his individual wishes upon the life of any man, woman, or child. Nothing but the very strongest conviction that the Church's teaching was unmistakable on that point would have induced him in bygone days even to warn and exhort his flock to bring their children to be baptized. He had the least of the "director" part of the priestly office about him that any man could have had. He was emphatically a "minister at the altar," a dispenser of gifts from above; not a dogmatist, nor a preacher, nor an exhorter, nor a guide, but a minister.

So David and he for once misunderstood each other. David was full of his mother's words, and Fanny's half-shown

love ; Mr. Burney of his charge, and the guardianship that he must so soon lay aside.

“ Yes,” he answered ; “ I suppose she will marry. It is that which grieves me, Davie, lad. She knows so little of the world and of men, she may give herself away to some worthless fellow, who only takes her for her fortune. I could wish to have been spared to see her happily settled, Davie.”

David could not speak ; it seemed as if his fate was trembling in the balance. The old man went on—

“ Her cousin has never concerned himself about her. Doubtless he has other affairs of consequence. I can scarcely hope that he will pay much attention to her now, and he must be an old man. Davie, Davie, my dear lad, I could wish—— ” And Mr. Burney paused, and looked anxiously at his nephew.

“ Dear Uncle Theo, I will do what you

wish," said David, in, it must be confessed, a choking voice. He was giving away himself, poor fellow! and he was a consideration to himself, if to nobody else.

"Thank you, dear lad. You are young, but you are to be trusted;" and the old man looked lovingly upon him. "You will look after the poor girl as far as is proper and right; see that no worthless fellow gets hold of her. Fanny will listen to you, and respect your opinion. She has always greatly regarded you from a child. Davie, lad, what is the matter?" For David had raised his head and given vent to one of his old shouts of boyish laughter; the relief to him was so great. "What is it, Davie?" said his uncle, unable to see where the joke lay, but smiling feebly in sympathy with his lad.

"Why, Uncle Theo, I thought you wanted me to marry her," explained

David, wiping his eyes of the tears his laughter had occasioned, "and I was preparing myself in spirit to be tied down to the horns of the altar and offered in sacrifice."

"Nay, Davie, lad; perhaps we have erred. I have never known marriage myself. Your poor dear mother's experience was not—— But we will not talk of that. Maybe your poor father was hampered by his other duties. I believe a military calling is a very hard and anxious one. But, Davie, we may have formed a wrong estimate of marriage."

"Ay," said David. "But, uncle, you must allow that the remedy is as irrevocable as the mistake."

Mr. Burney, weak as he was, gave a little chuckle. Anything that David said in the way of a joke seemed to him now so irresistibly funny.

"The fact is," said David, gravely,

“marriage is very good for women, but not for men; therefore, it happens that a certain number of the male sex have annually to be sacrificed for the sake of the women whom it will improve. Let us therefore find an inoffensive specimen and offer him to Fanny.”

But though he spoke lightly, his heart was very heavy—for did he not know how poor Fanny’s feelings lay?—and he could not but see that his uncle was regarding him in quite a new and unexpected light.

“But we have had no experience,” he said, as David concluded. “And, David, I cannot but think that a good loving wife would work no harm on you.”

“Don’t, don’t!” said David, getting up and speaking with an energy he had not shown before. “Don’t, Uncle Theo; don’t say another word on the subject now. I couldn’t bear it.”

“My dear lad!” said his uncle, as-

tonished. "Why, Davie, as if I would ever——"

"No, no, Uncle Theo, dear Uncle Theo, I know you never would; but don't speak of it again. At least, not now," David added hastily, as he saw a sudden disappointment take the place of the light of hope in his uncle's eyes. "Dear Uncle Theo, I will think about it, and I will do whatever you wish; but don't talk of it now."

"My only wish is for your happiness," said the old man, looking at him. "My dear lad, you have been the joy and crown of my life; let me not go down to my grave thinking I have hampered you by any wish of mine."

"Dear Uncle Theo, no, I shall never think that. We know each other too well for that."

"We will go on with Lorenzana's preface," said the old man; and David read to him for an hour, and for the

first time in his life his thoughts were far away from the book he read aloud, for it was clear to him that his uncle did wish for his marriage with Fanny.





CHAPTER III.

DAVID did not smoke his after-dinner pipe that evening; he strolled into the drawing-room, and chatted with his mother and Fanny instead, before going up to his uncle again. To make up for this, however, he had not one pipe, but half a dozen before he went to bed that night. Mrs. Everest could hear him crunching the gravel, as he walked up and down in front of the house and underneath her window—Mr. Burney's room looked the other way, and commanded a fine view of the stable-yard.

She wondered what was keeping him up and out so late. His uncle was not

any worse ; indeed, no change had taken place in him since the first shock of the stroke had passed off. It was quite true, as she had said, that he might live for years. Why, then, was David so agitated? She had noticed at dinner that he was nervous, that he talked and laughed with an affectation of high spirits that was unusual with him ; and now she could hear him walking heavily, as though in moody thought, not as if in enjoyment of the moonlight air and his pipe.

She lay awake and thought. David, in his gloomy pacing down below, did not give her credit for the anxiety that kept her thoughtful and sleepless upstairs. With all her faults, Mrs. Everest had a deep and real interest in her son's welfare. It was, perhaps, her very anxiety on this head that made her captious and exacting and complaining to him. Goodness is often clothed in unprepossessing forms. Mrs. Everest,

had she been more really selfishly inclined, would have made a much more pleasant mother.

Fanny was the only disquieting element that she could think of. Was it possible that David and his uncle had been talking of her? She recalled to mind that David had been curiously nervous and unlike himself with Fanny that evening; had asked her to sing in a blundering, awkward way; and had then turned quite red when she suddenly spoke to him—evidences of disquietude of mind never hitherto observed in that most calmly indifferent of sons.

So Mrs. Everest lay awake, and thought and planned and prayed, for she was a genuinely religious woman; and David smoked and paced and, it must be confessed, cursed all women in general, though no one in particular, for raising even the faintest barrier between himself and his uncle. It was the first time

anything had been said between them on which they were not of the same opinion.

Mr. Burney, too, was awake, although he had been settled for the night, and the nurse was already dozing in her easy-chair. His heart was with his lad out in the night, for he had heard him go out, and in the stillness could hear a faint echo of his footsteps. He feared he had expressed his wish with regard to David's future too strongly, and that this wish would unduly influence his boy's decision. He longed for David to leave London and his uncongenial toil, to lead a life of learned ease, for which he was so well adapted ; he also longed that his ward should be safe and happy, and should not fall into the hands of designing fortune-hunters. But, above all things, he desired his lad's happiness. Provided David and Fanny loved each other, their marriage would have closed his life in

perfect happiness. So he, too, lay awake and thought, and prayed earnestly that his selfish wishes might not blind his eyes, but that the lad's happiness might be helped, not hindered by him.

And Fanny? Fanny—the cause of all these cares and hopes and fears—slept sweetly. She was a good sound sleeper, and took her ten hours of that refreshment nightly. Her cheeks would not have been so rosy, her eyes so bright, nor her neck so white, had she not slept so long; for, like many heavy fair women, she required a good deal of rest. She came down in the morning looking as bright as possible, and was quite unconscious of there being anything unusual the matter.

There was a letter for David that morning from Miss Hatchard. A great throb of his heart sent the blood rushing through his veins as he recognised her handwriting. The image of Fiametta,

now pathetic in its lonely helplessness, now white and agonised by sin and terror, had been before his eyes all night. He had been trying to think of Fanny, of his uncle's wish respecting her, but he had only been able to dwell in thought upon the "little girl" of the gaunt attic in Bloomsbury.

He trembled as he took the letter up. He had written twice to Fiametta, and once to Miss Hatchard, and this was the first answer that had come from either of them. A sudden terror that she was dead came to him, and for the first few minutes he could hardly read the few curt lines of which the letter consisted. Fiametta had left Harcourt Street, Miss Hatchard said. She had had an offer of bettering herself, and had gone. She had left no message for any one, nor any address; and the writer seemed to have an especial pleasure in dwelling upon these statements, for she repeated them

again at the end of her letter, as if she enjoyed them.

“Good gracious, David!” said Mrs. Everest, as she came into the room, “what is the matter with you? Your face is quite white, and your lips are trembling.”

“I—I have a headache,” said David, turning and looking at her with troubled, glazed eyes; and then he went out of the room with the letter in his pocket.

The iron band about his heart had tightened, until he scarcely seemed able to breathe. He was only conscious of suffering the most horrible and suffocating anxiety. He did not think of himself, at least not consciously; all his fear was for the girl, who by her passion had perhaps been led into a grave of her own seeking. He thought that to such a nature as hers, self-destruction might well be an ever present, ever possible, and easy way of escape from trouble.

He could not wait to write, but almost ran down to the telegraph office in the village, and despatched a telegram to Miss Hatchard.

“Is she alive? Tell me where she is, or with whom she is. Reply at once.”

No answer came until the evening, and then it gave but very scanty information.

“She have left here with a friend, and will be well took care of. I shall not say any more.”

This was satisfactory in one way, but not in another. The identity of this friend must remain a miserable uncertainty, and he puzzled himself in vain thinking who could have befriended the girl who had no friends, save Miss Hatchard and himself. But he had little time to bestow on thoughts even of Fiametta now, for a sudden change for the worse took place in Mr. Burney. David never left him day or night, and the memory of his half-expressed wish

about Fanny lay like a load of lead upon his mind.

Perhaps the old man, with the keen insight that comes of deep devotion, knew what was passing in David's mind ; for one night, just before the end, when those two were quite alone together, he looked up into his lad's eyes as he bent over him, and said—

“Davie, dear lad, remember, I have no wish about Fanny, except that you will look after her affairs for her with her cousin ; no other wish at all.”

“If you have,” said David, very gravely, “before God, I will carry it out.”

“Dear lad, my own lad, I have no wish at all ; remember, Davie, no wish at all.”

David pressed his hand and was silent ; and thus the first and last faint cloud that had ever come between them passed away. David never left him again, and the next day he was gone—died with his

hand in David's, his eyes turned towards him, and a beautiful smile upon his face for him who was as the son of his love.

Of the three left behind, David made by far the least fuss about his grief. Fanny had never been in the presence of Death before, and her nerves gave way, and she sobbed and cried hysterically. She was really very sorry that her kind old guardian was dead—very sorry, indeed; but the darkened rooms, and the stealthy creep of the servants, and the men who came in and out mysteriously, were all rather more awful to her than the loss she had sustained. She brightened up after the funeral, and put fresh flowers in the rooms, and went for her accustomed walks with renewed vigour. Death was unpleasant and exciting, and ought to be ignored as much as possible.

Mrs. Everest wept a great deal for the first few days—wept sincerely now it was too late over the many crosses she had

laid upon those meek shoulders. She was not a hard-hearted woman, only domineering and uncertain-tempered. Mrs. Everest and women like her have very real suffering. They lay up the foundations of it carefully during a long career of activity, and weep over the consequences of their faults at leisure in their old age, or when Death steps in and robs them of the object of their attentions.

David and his mother came nearer together in these first days of their common loss than they had ever done before. Perhaps David's quietude under the blow that had fallen upon him deceived his mother. She did not understand the depth of such quiet grief, and so gave him credit for caring less about his uncle's death than he did. Her vehement, noisy grief was a great comfort to her in a little while, and became, after the first bareness of it was over, almost as much

of a consolation to her as a good conscience respecting the dead could have been. She had been a very afflicted widow, and was now an equally bereaved sister ; and it took very little time for her to believe that she and her brother had been united by the holiest ties of mutual affection and closest friendship.

Fanny was very sorry for the old man's death, too. He had ever been kind and affectionate to her, and she missed him in his accustomed place. But she did not break her heart, or anything like it ; only she preserved a decorous gravity, and never even suggested lawn tennis, although the weather was bright and clear for three days after the funeral. On the fourth day after the funeral, she did mention the subject at breakfast. St. Martin's summer had fulfilled its engagements that year, and with such ardour that, but for the leafless branches, it would be easy to believe September was not yet over.

Therefore Fanny's suggestion was not as out of place in Devonshire as might appear to fog-tormented Londoners in early November.

"The nets are all taken in, and the courts will have to be marked out; it's too much trouble," said David.

"Not if Fanny wishes it," said Mrs. Everest, reprovingly, but thinking at the same time that opportunities for conversation are rather wanting in lawn tennis. "Would not a walk be better on such a lovely day?"

"I am going back to town to-morrow," said David; "my leave is up."

Mrs. Everest began to be pathetic.

"You surely won't go away and leave us now?" she said. "What are we to do about the house? Oh, David, I did not think you could be so unkind!"

"It is not unkindness, mother; but I must go and see Fanny's guardian. He has taken no notice of my letters to him.

We must get his consent for her to live at the Hall."

"I can't live there without mamma," said Fanny, decisively. "I should die; I know I should."

"Nothing can be settled until I see Mr. Betterton," said David. "I will try and get a few days' special leave, and come down again, mother; but it won't do for me to risk my place now;" and David sighed heavily.

"I don't see why you ever went to such a horrid place," said Fanny, in her calm, not-to-be-contradicted voice. "It was absolutely unnecessary, and I am sure poor Uncle Theo thought so."

David got up and walked away from the breakfast-table. He could not bear that allusion to his uncle from Fanny's lips. Mrs. Everest was horror-struck. That David and Fanny should quarrel would wreck all her hopes.

"Run after him, Fanny!" she cried.

“Tell him you did not mean to hurt his feelings.”

Fanny turned red and white.

“I have not hurt his feelings,” she said. “Mamma, David knew quite well that Uncle Theo did not like his going.”

“Yes; but he can’t bear for *you* to reproach him with it,” said Mrs. Everest, ignoring the fact that she herself had sent David to London. “Perhaps it was a mistake, and I am sure he feels it so now, poor fellow! Run after him, and tell him you did not mean to hurt him, Fanny.”

“I shall do nothing of the kind,” said the young lady, very deliberately. “David behaved very rudely in going away like that without a word;” and, with head erect, Fanny sailed out of the room.

Mrs. Everest began to cry; but she suddenly stopped and brightened up.

“If it really is going to be a quarrel,” she said to herself, “perhaps after all

nothing could be better ; for they must make it up before he goes away, and there is nothing like making up a quarrel to bring people together. It is a good sign that he was so touchy with her. I never knew him pay so much attention to anything she said before ;” and Mrs. Everest comforted herself, and was vastly proud of this latest stroke of generalship on her part.

Fanny’s words had annoyed David precisely because they came from her. They seemed to point out to him what he feared his uncle really had wished about Fanny, before he perceived David’s disinclination towards her. His nerves were overstrained by his watching, his sleepless nights, the loss he had had, and his pain about Fiametta. He had been obliged to stay over the funeral, of course ; but he meant to go back to London immediately afterwards. He had felt unable to answer Fanny without some amount of irrita-

tion, so to avoid doing that he walked away.

Without caring very much where he went, he strolled into the stable-yard, at the back of the house. His mother's pony was there being groomed, and a fine young spirited mare was in the loose box. She had recently been purchased for Fanny, as that young lady had expressed a desire to ride. She had not mounted her yet, as the saddle and habit had not come from Exeter; and the steady old man of all outdoor work, who had been at the Rectory ever since David was a child, had found the energetic movements of the new purchase rather dislocating to his elderly rheumatic limbs; so the mare was decidedly restless, for want of sufficient exercise.

David looked at the mare. She was a pretty creature, with a small head and good legs; but her eyes were very bright, and her head restless.

“Looks rather a good sort,” he said to the man.

“Eas; ought to be for the money she cost. Out o’ the way, Muster David, for her be a bit vriskey this morning.”

“Has she been out lately?”

“Why, no; not to say lately. I got a zight o’ things to tend to. The wheels o’ thicky gashly ould hearse cut up th’ walks, so as I’ve been hard to work to smooth ’un. Don’t ’ee go a nigh her, Muster David.”

But the old man’s warning came too late. With that disregard of a horse’s legs that forms one of the characteristics of ignorance of that noble animal’s peculiarities, David ventured up to the mare, intending to give her that patronising pat on the nose that must be so exasperating to all superior horses.

“Whoa, poor old girl,” he said.

But the poor old girl, resenting the liberty taken by a perfect stranger, wheeled

as sharply half round on her four legs as she could have upon two, and, backing David in a very neat and able manner up against the partition between the boxes, gave him a smart tap on the shin with one of her feet; and then, with a playful “scrouge” of her round body, so as to show him she bore him no malice, began to rummage in her manger to see if by accident any hay was left there from breakfast.

David would have dropped but for the “scrouge;” for the mare had broken his leg, and a faintness came over him. But old Rogers had him out of the horse-box in no time, and, laying him on the stone floor, dashed a pail of water over him, to “bring him to,” as he said.

But David only partly came “to,” for the pain and the “scrouge” had been rather too much for him; and he fainted again, in the very act of receiving a second supply of water from the considerate Rogers.

Of course, the whole household was roused in no time; and David, with a good deal of difficulty, was moved into the study. A tall young man, even of so slim a make as David, may present considerable opposition of weight to three or four frightened women and an elderly man. They lugged him in between them somehow; Mrs. Everest holding the broken limb, and Fanny one of his hands. Fanny was more frightened than anybody. It was something dreadful to her to see David with his head hanging back, his eyes shut, and his face white; and to help to carry him was a depth of experience far beyond Fanny's previous imagination.

When he was laid upon the sofa in the study, and the servants were all sent scurrying in different directions for burnt feathers, and dry clothes, and brandy, and hot bottles, and rags, and bandages, and every medical appliance that a dis-

tracted establishment can call to mind on such an emergency, Fanny was left for a few minutes alone with David lying white and helpless before her.

Fanny was not one of those women who give way easily to crying. Her feelings were not of the evaporating nature, but she did cry now; for she was frightened, and she loved the helpless form before her with all the love that a somewhat phlegmatic nature could bring to bear upon anything. She still held his hand, for she had never relinquished it from the first, and her warm tears fell upon it as she bent over it. It is a common-place situation enough—a girl crying over her lover's hand—at least, common-place in books. It was anything but common-place to David, when he regained consciousness enough to perceive it. Indeed, so horrified was he at the situation, that a whole room full of burnt feathers would not have got a

single sneeze out of him. He instantly resolved that this faint should last until somebody else came into the room.

Nobody did come for some time. Mrs. Everest, having perhaps an inkling of how things were, had "generaled" the servants all over the upper part of the house; Rogers was galloping off on the pony to the nearest doctor; and she herself was hunting out remedies from her medicine cupboard, a repository of awful compounds, out of which she physicked the school children and the labourers for everything, from a toothache to a bad knee.

Fanny wept on. It was rather pleasant after a bit: it was very nice to hold David's hand, and it lay so helplessly on hers. She did not mind how long she held it.

David felt that things were growing serious. He could not keep up this sham faint much longer. He had an uncom-

comfortable consciousness that if the throbbing in his leg did not soon improve, that he should be obliged to find relief in that profanity in which his liturgiological studies had made him so proficient; and there was also a disagreeable certainty that a deep red was growing in his face on account of this very embarrassment. Even so innocent a girl as Fanny must know that a young man does not lie in a faint with a deep rose suffusing his cheeks, and the very consciousness of this turned David crimson. Then a faint groan escaped from his lips, for in the agony of that flush he had slightly moved his broken leg.

Fanny dropped his hand instantly. She was not the girl to give any encouragement unsought to any man. She could not restrain her tears, but she dropped them into her handkerchief, instead of upon his hand. Lest she should take it again, David opened his eyes.

“Where is my mother?” he said.

“Don’t cry, Fanny.”

“Oh, dear David! are you better?”

“Scarcely, till my leg is set. It’s broken, I suppose?”

“Rogers is gone for the doctor,” said Fanny. “Oh, David, will you forgive me for being so unkind this morning?” and poor Fanny sobbed hysterically.

“Don’t cry, Fanny dear; there is nothing to forgive. You will make yourself ill; besides, I am not dying.”

“You are not angry with me? Oh, David, mamma said I was so unkind!”

“Nonsense,” said David, a little pettishly; “you were nothing of the sort. Have I been put under the pump?”

“Rogers threw some water over you,” said Fanny, drying her eyes, and feeling as if some of that wholesome fluid had been applied to her.

“Some water! A riverful; I am wet through!”

“We were all so frightened at your fainting,” said Fanny, timidly — David awake was so different from David in a faint. “Oh, don’t do it again!” she cried, as she saw a pallor spread over his face.

“Brandy,” he said; and, as Mrs. Everest came in with her arms full of things, Fanny ran to the sideboard in the dining-room, and brought him some.

“Did you think I was a temperance cause?” he asked sulkily, as he tried to get off his wet necktie. “I don’t care so much for a broken leg; but I am not going to be pumped on to please anybody.”

“Oh, my dear boy! Rogers was so frightened.”

“Well, he didn’t think drowning would restore me to life, I suppose?”

“David, David, think of your mercies. You might have been killed. Where would you have been then?”

“In Abraham’s bosom, or the other place,” said David. “Please go away, and let me get my shirt off. I am not going to have rheumatic fever to please Rogers.”

“Oh dear, what a dreadfully rebellious frame of mind he is in!” said Mrs. Everest to Fanny, as they went into the hall. “He might have been kicked to death, and now I can hear him using such awful language at his clothes. Oh dear, it is dreadful!”

David certainly was in the most outrageously bad temper. A broken leg is not a pleasant thing, but it scarcely justifies the stream of execration that David bestowed upon his as soon as his mother and Fanny were out of the room. Here he was laid up for several weeks, just at the very time when it was most necessary that he should go away. There was Fiametta to see after (he thought of her first), Fanny’s guardian to see, some

arrangement to be made for his mother—a home to provide for her, unless she went with Fanny to the Hall—and, last and not least, if he remained bound down to a bed, in the hands of his mother and Fanny, how could he get out of proposing to the latter?

So David fretted and fumed, and by the next day was in a considerable fever, and for a good many days he had rather a bad time of it. His mind wandered a good deal, and he was reduced to such a state of utter helplessness and weakness that he could scarcely raise his hand to his face. In such a plight, what can a man do but submit to his mother, if she be with him? and David made the meekest of patients.





CHAPTER IV.

OUR hero was now in a favourite position of the traditional hero of romance—stretched on the bed of pain, with a fair damsel ministering to his wants. It was highly romantic, but not at all to David's taste. David never had a soul for the sentimental, or an eye for the picturesque, or a yearning after the infinite, or, in fact, any aspirations at all, unless it were to live peaceably, and humbly follow after liturgical lore. The present *rôle* of prostrate knight with a ministering angel did not suit him at all.

He was not a bad patient, in the ordinary sense of the word; that is, he

was neither impatient nor fretful, he took his medicines, and kept himself quiet ; but he was terribly, terribly bored, for he was not allowed to smoke.

His mother—conscientious woman—sat up with him at nights and tended him most of the days. Whenever David opened his eyes, they seemed to rest on her little wiry, upright figure ; and the moment she caught his glance, up went her sharp little forefinger, and a “ Hu-s-sh ! ” hissed through the room. Yet David was not going to speak, far from it. He did not even want to look at anybody, much less talk to them.

After his first restless, half-delirious days were over, she began to read aloud from the thick black volume she always had on a little table beside her. David from his youth up had entertained a lively hatred of that strongly bound, stamped, leather-covered volume, with its innumerable slips of paper and texts and markers

His worst sufferings as a lad had been connected with that sombre book; and now in his weakness it seemed to haunt him like a night-mare, for it was always before him, and even when asleep he heard the heavy greasy flap of its leaves—they had been too well thumbed to rustle.

Mrs. Everest read to her son such soothing portions of Scripture as were most likely to awaken him to a sense of sin, and otherwise disturb his mind. His present illness she looked upon in the light of a dispensation of Providence working specially in her behalf. She had never had David all to herself before, since they first came to the Rectory; it was a blessed opportunity, and she made the most of it. Accordingly, she went through the Lamentations of Jeremiah to him, followed by a course of the smaller prophets, and the most withering chapters of Ezekiel; with a few strong chapters

out of Job thrown in for a variety ; and some sermons of the “ speedy damnation ” class, from her own pet preachers for an afternoon homily.

Such exhilarating fare as this, so soon after his uncle’s death and Fiametta’s desertion of him, naturally produced a certain effect on David. The most noticeable symptom perhaps was his intense sleepiness. He really scarcely seemed able to keep awake at all ; and his mother was almost tempted to shake him sometimes, when he began to snore at about the third verse of a chapter. After a day or two, however, she began to suspect him, and read on through all his pretended slumbers in a hard grating voice, that left no hope for the prodigal upon the bed.

In this extremity David turned to Fanny. Surely Fanny might come and talk to him now that he was able to dress partly and to sit up in bed.

Mrs. Everest hesitated. It was the dearest wish of her heart; but was it proper? She finally decided that if David put his coat on it was. So Fanny was admitted, and as Mrs. Everest's readings were discontinued during her visits, David welcomed her more cordially than he might otherwise have done.

All the same he was very glad to see Fanny. His confinement bored him frightfully, and his thoughts about this time were far from pleasant. His easy, careless indifference had given place to a deep-seated pain and restless longing. He grieved sincerely for his uncle; he was his first, best, and truest friend. But deep as was his sorrow for the old man, he exaggerated it to himself, for his uncle's death was not the chief cause of his pain. Fiametta's intended crime, her heartless desertion of him, and her indifference to him, pained him more than he acknowledged to himself. Her

power over him was greater than he knew, but he did know that he was anxious and fearful both for her mind and future.

Fanny chatted to him, Fanny sang to him, Fanny brought all her little arts to amuse him. Perhaps she was happier in these days than at any time of her life, for she had David's attention more completely than ever she had before; and as he grew stronger after his fever, and so depended more and more upon her for amusement, the happier and brighter she became. She had never been so sweet in David's eyes before. A sick room is one of the best possible backgrounds on which to show forth a good woman's virtues, more especially those of a possible wife. Fanny was quiet and gentle in her movements, not brisk and bustling like his mother; she was serene and placid, not noisy, nor melancholy; more particularly, she was not

given to exhortation, warning, nor rebuke. Mrs. Everest was unconscious of the foil she made to Fanny, but it served her purpose well.

So matters went on for a while, and David was able to get about with a crutch, and Fanny and he saw more of each other every day; not a word came in answer to his repeated letters to Miss Hatchard; and day by day there seemed more reason why he should make Fanny happy, and less reason why he should think about Fiametta. And had not Mrs. Everest grown tired of waiting, and tried to hurry on matters a little, being one of those worthy women who never can let well alone, it was possible that David might have drifted into a sort of tacit engagement with the heiress.

Of course, on old Mr. Burney's death a new rector had been appointed, who, being a fellow of his college, was in no very great hurry to enter into residence,

and had willingly agreed to allow Mrs. Everest to remain in the old home until after Christmas, a curate being engaged to fulfil the clerical duties meanwhile.

This curate, who had lodgings in the village was of course a frequent visitor at the Rectory, and was very soon received there in the fraternal fashion so common among clerical families in the country; that is, he came in whenever he liked, and at any hour that suited him, and if lunch or dinner happened to arrive, he stayed and partook of it. In this way he saw a good deal of Fanny, especially at first, when David was unable to come downstairs.

It is commonly known that curates— young curates—are not generally deficient in what is known among men as “cheek;” that is to say, they will unhesitatingly, by right as it were of their office, make love to the prettiest and richest girls in the neighbourhood, with nothing but the

“cloth” and expectations to offer them. Mr. Wilton Lethbury, of course, fell in love with Fanny. He was a young man, pale-faced, and black-haired, with large melancholy grey eyes, and a tendency to consumption, which, with a precarious income of one hundred pounds a year, he was prepared to lay at the feet of the heiress.

Few women can avoid feeling full of pity towards a consumptive young man, especially if he is tall and good-looking. Every young man in Orders has potentialities in women’s eyes. He may be a bishop, if he only lives. Mrs. Everest gave him doses out of her medicine cupboard, and prescribed flannel and strengthening plasters. Fanny knitted him a woollen comforter to wrap round his throat and mouth when he went back to his lodgings in the evenings. They closed every window directly he came into the house, and piled the fires up

the chimneys, until the unfortunate youth was nearly suffocated in that mild, damp climate. But he bore it all with meekness, nay, with joy; for he adored Fanny, and, even if he suffocated, he would die at her feet. It was this hapless young creature that Mrs. Everest tried to use as a sort of rival to rouse her son.

They were sitting in the drawing-room one evening, and Fanny had been singing, and Mr. Lethbury had been turning over the music for her, while David, it must be confessed, yawned upon the sofa. He was getting horribly tired of his present life.

“David,” whispered Mrs. Everest, in a stealthy manner, as the two at the piano chatted together at the farther end of the room, “have you noticed anything lately?”

“Yes; that I am getting fastidious about the cooking. That goose was villainously done to-day. Another broken

leg, and I shall develop into a gourmand. Life is all meals at present."

"David, you are so flippant! Now listen to me. Have you noticed nothing about dear Fanny lately?"

"No, nothing particular, except that I have come to the end of her *répertoire*. I have literally talked her out. She hasn't another idea left upon any subject."

"You are the most ungrateful boy that ever lived! And how that dear girl has devoted herself to you lately!" and Mrs. Everest took out her handkerchief.

"So she has; she is a dear girl. It isn't her fault that you can always tell what she will say on any given subject. She has been cast in moulds, and then blocked together; but she is a nice good girl for all that."

"I should think she was, indeed!" said Mrs. Everest, angrily. "The sweetest, dearest girl that ever lived! Now, mark

my words, David, if you don't step in and win her, somebody else will, and carry her off before your very eyes;" and Mrs. Everest looked very expressively at the tall thin figure bending over the piano.

"You don't mean it?" asked David, with a twinkle in his eyes that she could not understand, and, therefore, it made her more angry than she was before.

"Yes, I do," she retorted. "Anybody can see it with half an eye."

"Then," said David, taking up the book he had been reading, and speaking with conscious superiority, "if Fanny likes a skeleton tied up with a cough in a black coat, let her have him;" and he turned his back upon his mother, and settled himself to read; but he looked so often over the book at the skeleton in the coat during the rest of the evening, that his mother was comforted.

There was quite a beautiful benignity

about him as he bade Mr. Lethbury good night and inquired after his cough, an ailment that, though conspicuous, he had never taken any notice of before; and he was more than usually affectionate to Fanny, as she gave him her shoulder to lean on going upstairs.

“Dear David,” thought Fanny, as she closed her room door, and began to take the hairpins out of her hair, “he is so kind to everything that is suffering. How he does pity that poor Mr. Lethbury!” Here Fanny smiled, for of course she knew of the curate’s devotion, and it was reassuring to find that David pitied him for his hopeless attachment. “Poor fellow!” she said—this time it was Mr. Lethbury, not David, that she alluded to. “He is very interesting. Fancy David’s having found it out, though!” and here Fanny smiled and coloured, looking at herself in the glass as she did so.

“Dear David,” said Mrs. Everest, as she piously opened her Bible, and settled herself into her armchair by her bedroom fire, “my words have opened his eyes and made him feel his position. He pressed her hand, I am sure; and his eyes were on her all the evening. There is much to be thankful for.” And Mrs. Everest read the history of the golden calf with much spiritual comfort and refreshing, and went to bed, well satisfied with this world and the next.

David’s feelings were in a much more undecided condition. He could scarcely tell if he was glad or sorry. At first there had arisen in his mind that ready disparagement of his rival that is natural to every healthy Englishman. No man likes to be displaced in a girl’s affections by another man, even if he is not violently in love with the girl in question. David was not in love with Fanny, but he had been fond of her for many

years, and he did not like the idea of being supplanted by Mr. Lethbury. It might perhaps have been somewhat of a blow to his self-love to discover that Fanny might really care as much for this flimsy young man as she did for him. Although he did not want to marry her, he did not like the idea of her marrying such a man as Mr. Lethbury. It had not been from pure kindness that he asked after Mr. Lethbury's cough and recommended a respirator and goloshes, but from motives as nearly malicious as any that ever entered David's mind. He forgot that consumption has in it something rather attractive to girls—Heaven only knows why, for it is ghastly enough in all its stages—and also that women have not that loathing of physical disease that men so commonly have. Seeing that much of a woman's life is spent in nursing, it is merciful that they have not; possibly, too, their superior capacity for pity

leaves no room for the other feelings. David regarded consumption as a repulsive disease, Fanny as a melancholy and interesting complaint that added an attraction to the possessor.

He did not pass a very good night. He did not want to lose Fanny, neither did he want to keep her, but on the whole the idea of losing her was not so bad as the idea of marrying her. He had shrunk from this when his mother first proposed it to him; he shrank from it more than ever now. Gradually, very gradually, a thought had been coming to him during the past few weeks. It took definite shape in the long hours that he lay awake that night, and he determined that until he knew what had become of Fiametta he would never marry Fanny.

He felt a little uneasy the next morning as he dressed himself. He had often wished during his illness that he had told his mother and Fanny about the girl he

thought so much about. He almost felt that he had Fanny's love under false pretences, seeing that she did not know even of the existence of the person in whom he felt most interest in the world. He never contemplated so seriously the possibilities of his marrying Fanny at some remote period, as he did that morning when he made up his mind to tell her about Fiametta. There was something solemn to him in this confidence, the first he had ever given her. Her reception of it might influence the course of his life.

It was after breakfast that he resolved to tell her, at the hour when his mother investigated the state of the household and stable-yard, and gave her orders for the day.





CHAPTER V.

“FANNY,” David said, as soon as his mother had left them alone together, “I have something to say to you.”

Fanny, who was sitting beside the window, kept her eyes fixed on the distant landscape, but made no reply. There was something in David’s tone that raised a certain antagonism within her. Without knowing why, she felt annoyed.

“I want to tell you about a friend of mine—a girl that I knew in London.”

Fanny bit her lips.

“She is a great friend of mine. I made her acquaintance accidentally. She

lived in the same house that I did. Shall I tell you her story? It is a very curious one."

David's voice sounded strange both to himself and to Fanny; it was jerky and strained. He was not at ease with himself or his audience. Directly he had begun to speak he had felt a hitherto unknown embarrassment creep over him; he suddenly felt that he placed himself in a position in which he must either tell Fanny that he loved her or some other woman, and he was not clear that he did either. His voice betrayed his confusion; and his eyes, instead of looking at the girl he addressed, wandered restlessly about the room, and at last fell upon the carpet, where he kept them fixed. Had he been a schoolboy confessing a fault, he could not have looked more awkward or embarrassed.

Fanny, on the other hand, had never been calmer or cooler. As David's con-

fusion increased, so did her coldness. She was angry and mortified within, but statuesque without. From the moment that David began to speak, she knew for a certainty that he did not love her.

“I do not know any people with ‘curious’ histories,” she replied, in her steadiest, coldest tones. “Perhaps you had better not tell it to me.”

“But I want to do so very much,” persisted David. “In fact, I ought to have told you before——” But here he stopped abruptly, for the thought arose in both their minds that hitherto Fanny had certainly had no recognised right to any of David’s secrets. His face grew red, and hers white; he fixed his eyes upon the carpet more intensely than before, but Fanny spoke.

“You are under no obligation to tell me anything, but if you wish to tell me about any of your friends, of course I shall be interested.”

“Thank you,” said David. “I will tell you. This girl, she was a child when I knew her first.”

“When you first went to town was only a year ago.”

“Really! It seems like several years. Well, she was only a child then, so I suppose she must be little more than one now, but she seems to have grown into a woman. She is half an Italian. Her father was a man of property, and lost it all; but he cherished a delusion that he was the rightful heir to a large property, and spent his life in the British Museum turning over old charters and deeds, and doing sometimes a little work. They were dreadfully poor, and lived in a garret at the top of the house.”

“How did you come to know them?”

“I—I met her on the stairs. No; she came to my room one evening,” faltered David, with a sudden consciousness of the unconventionality of Fiametta’s proceed-

ings. He had never viewed her from the young lady standard of propriety before.

Fanny drew herself up a little stiffly.

“Indeed? Was she employed as a servant?”

“Oh dear, no; she is a lady—I mean she is a lady by birth and manner, though of course she has had very little education. You would be very sorry for her if you knew her, Fanny. She is very lovely—beautiful! I never saw anybody like her. She has those wonderful dark Italian eyes, and a quantity of red gold hair. She seems to have suddenly grown up; and it is very dreadful for her to be so poor. Fancy, sometimes she has not even had food to eat; and, I believe, she has only one dress. I never saw her in any other—a shabby cotton, like servants wear.”

“Poor thing!” said Fanny; and her voice was a little more tender, for David’s eyes were on her, and he was speaking

in a quick, nervous way. She almost fancied there were tears in his eyes. He went on.

“But the most dreadful thing about her is, that her mind has been poisoned by reading some dreadfully wild socialistic books, and they have quite turned her brain, for she is full of enthusiasm and courage. I believe she would gladly die for her opinions. Only think of that young girl going into frightfully low public-houses, and distributing pamphlets among the men drinking there! You can have no conception what such places are like, thank God! but only think of her doing such a thing!” And David’s eyes grew very bright as he leant over the side of the sofa he was on, and gazed at the girl in the window.

“Just fancy,” he went on, “your going even into the Cygnet on such an errand, and there are only decent labouring men there. You can have no idea of the

sights and sounds among which that poor girl has lived. No wonder she hates the rich, for she has been told that all the misery she sees is their fault."

"She need not have gone," said Fanny, with a little flush of anger upon her face. "Why did she not stay at home? The idea of a girl going into a public-house!"

"But she thought to do the poor wretched people some good. Think of her devotion, Fanny!"

"It is the clergyman's place and not hers to distribute tracts. It was most improper;" and Fanny laid one of her smooth white hands over the other and looked out at the wintry landscape.

David felt a sudden collapse come over him. He could not go on with his enthusiastic description of Fiametta. Metaphorically, cold water had been thrown over him. He stared rather helplessly at the girl in the window.

"It seems to me," said Fanny, break-

ing the silence, “that you have not been making very desirable acquaintances, David; but, of course, I know that men do know plenty of people that ladies do not. Have you anything more to tell me about this girl?”

“She was very unhappy,” said David, rather vaguely, feeling that he must say something, but that whatever he could say was useless—“very unhappy. Her father was arrested for trying to take a deed that he found. He was quite mad, poor old fellow! and—and he died in prison.”

Fanny opened her eyes a little wider. “Indeed!” was all she said.

“Yes; and this poor girl, we were great friends, you know, Fanny.”

“No, I did not know.”

“Yes, we were, very great friends. She ran away, because she could not bear the disgrace. I believe she would have drowned herself, if I had not found her.”

“Indeed!”

“Yes; she was in the most dreadful state. Think what an awful position she was in, with no home, no money, no friends!”

“You forget that *you* were her friend.”

“Oh yes, of course I was her friend; but, then, what could I do for her? Besides, I don’t think she cared much about me; in fact, I am sure she cannot, for—for she has never answered my letters, and I don’t know what has become of her.”

“Possibly she has found another friend,” said Fanny.

It was the unkindest speech she ever made in her life; but David’s excited, earnest manner, and the deep shining of his eyes, told her far more than his words. She saw that he cared about this girl as he never had cared for her; moreover, she believed that he knew it, and she resented the cruelty of his relating to

her the story of his love for another woman. It was an insult to her and her love for him, for immediately she thought that he knew of her passion, and had taken this method to convince her of its hopelessness. She was very angry, very hurt, and the cruel speech dropped from her lips before she was aware of the double meaning of it.

David flushed all over. In that moment he hated the calm, insolent creature in the window, who could throw scorn on the friendless girl in her distress. He had never felt so angry or so strongly moved in his life before. It was as if a cloth had fallen from a window in his soul that had been blocked up all his life, and he now for the first time saw the fair landscape that had been hidden. In the same moment that he hated Fanny, he felt that he loved Fiametta, that all his life was bound up in her, that everything that was noble or beautiful, every aspiration

that was pure and good, had sprung from her and had been centred in her. Earth seemed more beautiful, and heaven more near to him in that moment. After his first feeling of repulsion for Fanny, he forgot her presence, forgot her scorn. His mind flew back to the one woman in the world for him, and he was only recalled from his vision by Fanny's voice.

"I presume you intend to find out where she is?"

"Find her!" said David, dreamily. "Yes; I shall never rest until I find her;" and then they both sat perfectly silent, he intent on his dream of Fiametta, she quivering with suppressed rage and indignation.

So the momentous question of his marriage had been settled by no word of his. In fact he forgot all about it, and would scarcely have realised, if he had been told, that he had actually approached this conversation with the dis-

tinct possibility in his mind of asking Fanny to marry him at some future time —always at some future time. It is not too much to say that every thought of Fanny was banished from him, as he sat with his eyes upon the fire, recalling Fiametta's image to his mind. He firmly believed now that he had always loved her, had loved her at first sight. It seemed impossible to him that he could ever have done otherwise. His other life slipped from him like a dream, and Fiametta and he lived alone in this world.

Fanny bore his silence and his dream as long as she could ; but poor Fanny had a heart, and it was beating wildly, more wildly than she knew that hearts could beat. She felt herself outraged and insulted, but she was wounded sorer than either, and nothing but her pride kept her outwardly calm and dignified.

“I think I hear mamma coming,” she said at last, rising slowly ; “perhaps it

would be as well, David, to acquaint her with the history—it is a ‘curious’ history—of your *protégée*. She will feel interested, no doubt. I am going down to the village; can I do anything for you?”

“Thank you, no,” said David, looking at her with a dazed expression in his eyes. “Fanny, you did not mean what you said just now? You could not be so cruel.”

“I do not know that I have said anything cruel,” she replied coldly. “I have never acted cruelly in my life. Women leave cruelty to men, as the more competent to inflict it;” and Fanny glided from the room.

Once upstairs in her own room, her calmness threatened to desert her, a great swelling rose in her throat, and unbidden and very bitter tears came into her eyes; but she forced them back.

“I will not cry,” she said to herself;

“nobody shall ever know that I cared. I will not even believe it myself. But it was cruel, cruel of him to tell me about her!” and Fanny’s boasted firmness gave way, and a few very hot tears dropped from her eyes upon the window-sill, as she leant her forehead against the cool panes.

But they were soon over, and in a short time she was going in her sealskin jacket and bright bird-hat down the muddy lane to the village. Nothing but a certain paleness about her cheeks and a brightness in her eyes told of her discomfiture; and when Mr. Lethbury met her in the lane, as he was coming to pay his morning call, he thought he had never seen her look so beautiful.

He turned and went back to the village with her, and then escorted her home; and David heard them laughing and chatting in the hall, as he lay by the fire in the drawing-room, and felt glad

that Fanny was happy, for he was well-disposed towards all mankind in the new light of his great discovery.

Mrs. Everest was not at all so well pleased, and when, after lunch, Mr. Lethbury professed an active interest in poultry, and Fanny offered to take him to see hers at the Hall, she had great difficulty in concealing her displeasure. However, as she could not very well say that Fanny should not visit her poultry yard, she could only mar matters as much as possible by going with them. This she did to Mr. Lethbury's intense discomfiture, for she took possession of him from the very doorstep, and instructed him in his duties towards the poor, and overhauled him for indiscriminate almsgiving in such a thorough manner that she frightened everything but his cough out of him, and Fanny never had a duller walk in her life.

Mr. Lethbury not being asked to come

back to the Rectory to dinner, naturally did not do so, but said "good-bye" to them in the village, and the two ladies walked back together, neither of them in the best of humours.

"Mr. Lethbury really does not look after those Jenkinses as he ought," said Mrs. Everest, emphatically. "There is that poor old man without a word of Scripture since Monday last, and anybody can see he has not many years to live. And he has been sending dinners to that good-for-nothing Molly Thomas, whose house and children are as dirty as they can be, and she more than half a Dissenter!"

"Mr. Lethbury says she is very weak and poor, and this last baby's death has pulled her down dreadfully," said Fanny.

"There is *no* charity in helping a slovenly woman!" snapped Mrs. Everest. "Don't tell me about her being pulled down! Isn't the fact of having five

children reason enough why a woman should bear up against the loss of the sixth, and a puny, miserable little thing it was? These young men have no discrimination whatever!"

"Well, I think he is very kind," said Fanny, rather to her companion's surprise. "I am sure he would never be cruel to anybody;" and Fanny's eyes filled with tears as she thought of David, but she turned away her head to hide them.

"I don't call it kindness to let the soul hunger and feed the body," said Mrs. Everest, sternly, "and that is what that young man is doing. He has never been near that pious old Jenkins since Monday; and I got it out of him that he never said a word of rebuke or exhortation to Molly! I have no patience with such young men, who think they know better than their elders!"

"I think he is very nice," said Fanny, in so unusually decided a tone that she

left her adopted parent standing speechless in the hall, while she went up the stairs to her own room.

“David!” said his mother, opening the drawing-room door suddenly, and speaking in a voice of such portentous solemnity and awfulness that he nearly jumped off the sofa with consternation, “David!” and she closed the door, “if you don’t speak to Fanny now, you will never win her.”

“I have spoken to her,” said David, looking at his mother in a way that she could not understand; but he spoke in a voice that she knew made any opposition on her part worthless. He had only used it once or twice in his life to her. “I spoke to her this morning after breakfast. We shall never be married.”

“You don’t—you can’t mean to say,” gasped Mrs. Everest, “that Fanny has refused you?”

“No matter whether Fanny refused

me or I refused her. It's settled; that's enough, isn't it?"

"No, it's not enough. I don't believe a word of it!" cried Mrs. Everest, her wrath overpowering her prudence. "I don't believe you have said anything of the kind to her! She couldn't refuse you, I am sure of it."

"I don't advise you to ask her," said David. "But this I can tell you, and, what is more, you must believe it—Fanny and I will never marry; and if you have any respect whatever for her feelings, or for mine, you will never speak to her on the subject, indeed, if you do do so, I will never see her again;" and David looked and spoke as though he intended his words to be obeyed. Mrs. Everest burst into tears.

"I am the most miserable of women!" she sobbed. "You are an ungrateful, wicked, rebellious son; you have never given me a moment's pleasure since you

were born. You have thwarted me in every wish, and trampled on every desire. I wash my hands of you. Follow your evil courses, and break my heart, as I know you will. I will never forgive you for this, David;” and the angry woman, in a tempest of tears and reproaches, left the room.

She did not come down again that evening. She was too angry. Fanny and David ate their dinner together in constrained silence or with jerky bits of forced conversation.

David had certainly succeeded in making everybody about him intensely miserable, and having by this time awakened to the fact that however much he loved Fiametta, she clearly did not love him, he went to bed no whit happier than the others.



CHAPTER VI.

FIAMETTA lay in the best bedroom of her cousin's house. She had been carried in there from the invalid carriage, and for many weeks she never so much as lifted her head from her pillow. The fever in her brain had been followed by a weakness so great, that it seemed at times doubtful if she were alive or dead. Everything that the tenderest care and best medical skill could do for her was done. Mr. Thorold and his gentle, affectionate wife devoted themselves to her. Had Fiametta been one of her own daughters, Mrs. Thorold could not have lavished more loving care upon her. She was a

sweet, sunny-haired, motherly creature, plump and fair, sweet-voiced and tender-hearted, and she took the forlorn orphan girl to her heart from the moment she was carried in at the hospitable door of Chaylesford House.

But minister as they would to her body, they could not reach that maze of wild ideas, hopeless delusions, and fierce passions, that coiled in tangled confusion in Fiametta's brain. The very dreadfulness of her visions kept her bound in a death-like silence. The sound of her own voice would have been more than she could have borne at first, for it would have given a reality to the most fearful of her visions. All she could think or hope for was that death would close quietly over her, and that the terrors that fled through her brain would be dispelled in the grave.

Her father's face haunted her day and night, always with the same haggard,

wild expression of baffled desire and helpless defeat upon it, as she had seen it last on the prison-bed. It never varied, never left her; and beside it, now faint as if in the distance, now close to her, was David's face of horror and aversion, as she had last seen it after the news of death had reached them. She was still too weak to put in order or explain to herself the meaning of the phantoms that haunted her; she only suffered under them intensely, and lay, as it were, wrapped about in a great horror of crime. She was not clear what she had done. She had a confused sense of having murdered her father, but when, or in what manner she had done it, had faded from her entirely.

For weeks she took no notice of those about her, did not even reply to them when they spoke to her, and made no effort when the fever left her to discover where she was, or what had happened

to her. To leave her alone and let her die was her only cry, and it was with the greatest difficulty that proper food and medicine were administered to her.

It was indeed her extreme weakness that saved her ; she was unable to hold out long against her nurses. She had to swallow the food they brought her ; and so by degrees, and almost insensibly to herself, she did gain a little strength.

But though the fever that had turned her brain into a seething mass of fire had left her, she was very far from being yet in her right mind. Perhaps in reality she had not been so for a long time. Her unhealthy training, her morbid brooding spirit that had been turned inwards to nurse itself upon unhealthy dreams and impracticable chimeras, must have had a strong effect upon her. Her brain fever was but the natural result of the years that had gone before ; and now that the fever had left her, she might

have regained all her natural strength and clearness of mind, had it not been for the dreadful consciousness of crime that haunted her, and kept her thoughts in one continual strain of horror, remorse, and wild despair.

After her ravings had ceased, she never spoke for days, nay, weeks; and her taciturnity becoming serious, her cousin resolved to go and see her himself, to endeavour to rouse her into some sort of consciousness of her surroundings.

“I hope you are feeling a little stronger to-day, my dear,” he said, laying his small cool hand on one of her hot ones.

She drew it away; it was a little action, but significant.

“You are killing me,” she said feebly.

“My love, your weakness will soon pass away,” said Mrs. Thorold, keeping down the sense of injury she felt at seeing her husband’s hand pushed aside; “you are getting every day a little stronger.”

She had turned her face away from them and shut her eyes, now she looked full at Mrs. Thorold.

“It is not that,” she said. “I do not care if my body lives or not, but it is cruel of you to crush my soul.”

Mrs. Thorold looked in wonder at her husband; she thought the girl had gone out of her mind again. He understood her better, from having seen her before her illness.

“My dear,” he said, “you are too weak to know what your words mean. Your soul and body are both in God’s hands. We will pray that He may restore them both together;” and he gently laid his hand upon her head, as if she were a little child.

She looked up at him with her dark solemn eyes.

“There is no God!” she said.

Mrs. Thorold could scarcely repress a cry of horror. Her husband motioned her with his hand to remain quiet.

“Have you seen your cousins?” he asked, as if she had made no statement of her faith, or want of faith. “They are just your age, I think.”

“No; I do not want to see them. You are killing me, I say!” And with a cry she gathered all her feeble strength together, and threw his hand from her, sinking back exhausted as she did so.

A spoon was held to her lips, and Mrs. Thorold’s hand was under her head in an instant. She shut her lips, and tried to turn her head away, but Mrs. Thorold was firm.

“You must take it, love,” she said; “you must, indeed.”

Too weak to resist, the girl took the medicine, and it revived her. But Mr. Thorold had stolen away, thinking his presence might be harmful to her; so his wife sat by the bedside, watching the still face and closed lids until such time as it should please the invalid to speak or move.

She sat there for a long time quite quietly, then Fiametta suddenly said—

“It is mean and cruel of you to take such an advantage of me! I would rather be dead than here.”

“Hush, love! Death may come as a friend or a foe. I do not think you are fit for him just now.”

“Yes, I am; for I wish to die!”

“We hope you will not die yet, love.”

“You are cruel! oh, you are cruel!” cried the girl, turning her passionate eyes upon her; “for you have made me dread to die, for I shall go to my grave crushed down by all the weight of your kindness upon me. It is not real kindness; it is cruelty! You have robbed even my grave of rest for me.”

“My poor love!” cried the tender woman, melted to deepest pity by the pain in the girl’s face and voice, “you will not think such dreadful things when you are well. We all love you, dear.

Do not hurt us by saying such dreadful things."

"I don't want your love! You have no business to love me because I am your cousin," said Fiametta, looking long, nevertheless, at the sweet face beside her, and with a certain wistfulness in her own.

"I don't know that we love you altogether for that," said Mrs. Thorold, smiling; "you see, a third cousin is not a very near relation. But, my dear, you were so lonely and unhappy and unfortunate, we could not help loving you."

Fiametta closed her eyes, and moved her head restlessly about on her pillow.

"That is why I loved the poor and suffering," she said, dreamily. "I cannot think now."

"No, no, love; go to sleep. Everything will come right to you in time."

And Fiametta slept.

Little by little, as the winter went on,

Fiametta gained in strength bodily, but she remained as gloomy and taciturn as before. She had plenty to brood over, poor child; and as she grew more conscious of the life about her, a new and bitter pain grew within her. Where was David?

She would not have met him just then for all the world; the memory of his last look at her tortured her day and night, for she felt that he regarded her as a criminal. After that sweet close friendship that they had enjoyed together, it was bitter to feel that he had cast her off so thoroughly, that he did not know or care if she lived or died. Never a word or sign had come from him. Miss Hatchard had written to her several times, and the letters had been read to her as soon as she was strong enough to bear to hear them, but she had never said a word about David. She felt his absolute desertion of her very keenly. She did

not blame him for it. He was in her eyes so good that any contact with crime would be impossible to him; but he might have asked after her, as he asked after her father in prison. It was hard to be tossed aside as something so utterly worthless that even his pity could not reach her.

She was too proud to write and ask Miss Hatchard what had become of him; too weak, also, to collect her thoughts sufficiently to send even a message, had her pride allowed her to do so. She only lay and suffered, suffered in that exquisite way in which highly strung natures alone are capable of suffering—a very unenviable capability under some circumstances.

Those good people about her, Mr. and Mrs. Thorold, tried to amuse and interest her in many ways, but they never succeeded in doing either. They were too wise to force her, and they patiently

waited until the doctor pronounced that she might with safety see a new face, for they trusted that their girls could do with her what they had failed in doing. Girls can approach a girl in a way that no elderly person can.

It was on Cecily, their younger daughter, that the father and mother relied upon most to brighten their invalid. Cecily was just her own age, and a plump, pretty grey-eyed girl, with a soft voice and a gentle air, a bright smile, and the subtle sense of delicacy and refinement that clung to all the family at Chaylesford. It was impossible to imagine that any one of that household had ever been out of temper, or had ever done a rude or unkind action.

So, one sunny morning in December, when the snow lay like a white coverlid on the earth outside, and reflected the sun's rays that danced in at the broad windows of Fiametta's room, and mingled

with the ruddy light of the fire upon the hearth, Cecily came to see her cousin.

She felt rather shy at facing this mysterious, silent girl alone. She had been such a puzzle to them all, and she did not know how to treat her, or what to say to her. But the sight of the wasted face and skeleton hands roused her tender pity at once, and, stooping, she gently touched with her lips the long thin fingers.

Fiametta opened her eyes suddenly, and stared long and solemnly at the intruder. She had drawn her hand away at the first touch of Cecily's lips, and the little action had slightly embarrassed the new-comer.

"I am your cousin," she said, blushing—"Cecily. Irene is your other cousin. She is the elder. Mamma is busy to-day, so I have come to sit with you."

"I do not want anybody," said Fiametta, coldly.

Cecily smiled.

“You are thinking you are giving us trouble,” she said, “but you are not at all. We are only too glad to do anything we can for you. Irene and I have been longing to come and see you before, but the doctor said you were too weak.”

“I am not a show,” said Fiametta, an angry flush rising over her face. Cecily was quite shocked.

“You are our cousin,” she said simply, as if that quite settled and disposed of the question—“our only cousin, and we have been so sorry for you. Some days when we thought you were going to die, Irene and I could not sleep, we were so unhappy.”

“I cannot believe that,” replied Fiametta, looking closely at Cecily’s bright face and pretty plump figure. “You have been petted and happy all your life. You do not know what unhappiness means.”

Cecily was a little hurt by this speech. She had been genuinely concerned for her cousin, and, to say the least of it, the words were ungracious, but she was too sweet-tempered to show any offence.

“I have had a very happy life,” she said, “but that does not prevent my being sorry for people who have not. Poor darling!” and with a sudden rush of pity she bent over and kissed the wan face upon the pillows, “when you are stronger, you will be happier, too.”

“No ; I shall never be happy,” Fiametta replied, but in a softer tone than she had used before ; and then she turned her head away and closed her eyes.

“I wish Irene had come instead,” thought Cecily to herself ; “she would know so much better what to say.” And not liking to disturb Fiametta again, Cecily sat beside her bed and waited until it pleased the invalid to speak.

Fiametta was very restless, and turned

her head about uneasily for some time ; then she opened her eyes, and looking straight at her cousin, said—

“ I wish you would go away. I cannot rest with you here. You are full of happiness, down to the tips of your fingers, and you worry me.”

Cecily crimsoned, partly from the unkindness of the speech, partly from sorrow at her own failure, but she only said—

“ I am sorry ;” and rose to leave the room.

“ Stop !” said Fiametta, as she got to the door. “ Are you angry with me ? ”

“ No. You are ill, or you would not say things to hurt other people.”

“ Yes, I would. I always do.”

Cecily opened wide her eyes and looked in astonishment at her cousin. She had never heard of such a course of proceeding before. It was not the custom of the household to hurt the feelings of the meanest creature that breathed. Cecily

would not even have stroked a cat the wrong way, much less a human creature, so she made no reply at first.

“ You must have been very unhappy,” she said at last, as the only possible excuse she could find for such conduct.

A blaze lit up the sick girl’s eyes. She raised herself by a strong effort, and brought her clenched fist down upon the bedclothes.

“ I am in hell ! ” she cried ; and then, as suddenly as she had raised herself, she fell back in a fainting fit.

Cecily ran to the bedside, calling the nurse from the dressing-room as she passed, and together they managed to restore Fiametta to something like consciousness ; but she was so weak that she only lay quite still under their hands for the rest of the day, and Cecily felt that she had done more harm than good by her presence.

But the next day, as Mrs. Thorold was

sitting by Fiametta's bedside, she asked for her of her own accord.

"Where is that girl?" she said suddenly, after a long silence.

"Cecily, do you mean, love? She has gone for a walk with her papa, but Irene is in. Would you like to see her?"

"I don't care."

"I will call her," said Mrs. Thorold, thinking the presence of her gentle eldest daughter might be good for the invalid; so she summoned her, and let her enter alone, supposing that the two girls might get on better without her.

Irene came in slowly and quietly. Irene always moved gently. She never made a noise about anything. She seemed to many people as peace and rest personified. To the sick and dying in the village she was as an angel, to the living a type of all the heavenly graces. She was too good to live, everybody except her parents had said from her birth, but

she had managed to reach the age of twenty in spite of adverse prophecies.

She had entered so quietly in her soft clinging dove-coloured gown, that she had been standing beside the bed for some minutes before Fiametta saw her. She had fallen into a troubled kind of dream, and woke with a start in a half-dazed condition.

“Who are you?” she asked. She had been dreaming of her father’s death and her guilty deed, and some half-formed idea of an angel of justice flitted through her mind.

“I am Irene,” said the fair visitor, laying her soft small hand on the girl’s hot forehead.

“No; you can never come to me,” said Fiametta, looking up at her with glazed frightened eyes. She was thinking of the meaning of her cousin’s name, and was still but half awake.

Irene folded her arms about her neck,

and laid her cheek upon the close-cropped golden head. She knew at once what the girl meant.

“I am only your cousin, love,” she said, “with a beautiful name. We will learn what it means together, now that your bitterest troubles are past.”

But Fiametta only turned away her head.

“There is no peace for me,” she said. But she let her hand lie in that of her new found cousin’s, and Irene knew that some painful secret was weighing down the sick girl’s mind.

Every day after that she spent a great portion of her time beside Fiametta’s bedside, thus relieving her mother, and performing an office for which she was eminently fitted. Her softness of movement, the firm gentleness of her fingers, her aptitude for sitting motionless for hours, and a certain secret influence she possessed over the minds of others, all

fitted her to be the perfection of a sick nurse.

It was not difficult to see that Fiametta soon grew to find a certain pleasure in her presence. She always knew when she came into the room, and a light would flit across her eyes before she saw her. She never turned her face away from her greeting kiss as she had from Mrs. Thorold's and Cecily's, neither did she resent Irene's holding her hand, as she sometimes did. It was a slight thing, but enough to show that Irene had a certain sort of attraction for her.

By way of amusing her and rousing her attention, Irene one day brought her a photograph of some sculptures.

"Look at this," she said. "Papa bought it in Milan. This head"—pointing to the picture—"is said to be a portrait of one of your ancestors. Is not that interesting?"

But Fiametta only glanced carelessly

at it, and then, turning her face to the wall, said—

“I have no more in the way of ancestors than other people. The street scavenger has as many forefathers as I have. What have I to be proud of, in that some of mine have their names written in the account of blood and theft that is called history? Take it away!”

Not in the least discouraged by this failure, Irene tried to find another way in which to amuse her cousin. Anything seemed better than for her to pass her days in dreary brooding.

But nothing answered her purpose. Fiametta's brain was far too weak to allow her even to follow a conversation for more than a minute or two at a time. All the Thorolds could do for her was to wait and hope.



CHAPTER VII.

THERE is nothing very unusual or novel in Christmas Day coming in the end of December, but to Mrs. Fowler this festival appeared to delay its arrival in a most unjustifiable manner; for on the eve of that day she was to become the mistress of a house. The house in question was a very small one, it is true; but the Fowlers were not very large, and their income was decidedly limited, so the house suited them better than a larger one would. It was situated in the north of London, and was one of the many, many new yellow brick houses that stand in straight rows where a few years ago green fields had

been. Some of the green fields had become streets, the rest were brick-fields that would eventually become streets. None of the pavements were laid, and the roads had four inches of rut in them. There was a smell of new paint, new bricks, new stucco, new everything; and furniture vans unloaded daily somewhere in the road. All the houses were of a staring yellow, with very white stone doorposts, with bunches of flowers, carved by machinery, on the top. The blinds were all of the greenest, the steps of the whitest, the garden rails of the reddest, that the mind of man can conceive. Mrs. Fowler was charmed by their cleanliness and brightness, and, being an innocent young thing, believed that both would last, and that No. 60, Tomlinson Villas was a paradise upon earth.

On Christmas Eve they took in a couple of cabs their small portion of this world's goods to this favoured spot, and,

being guileless young people, sat down to wait on a trunk until several items of comfort, such as beds and chairs, arrived from an upholsterer, who had faithfully promised their delivery on that particular morning.

Far on into the day they sat, lunching contentedly off a bag of buns from the nearest confectioner's; and then Frederick, growing desperate, sallied forth to the said upholsterer, distant some two miles and a half, and had the pleasure of being assured that the van containing his furniture had left there some hours ago.

It might have done so, and the driver might have driven round by Richmond in going from Tottenham Court Road to the neighbourhood of Gospel Oak. Mr. and Mrs. Fowler sat up weary and anxious hour after hour into the night. Mr. Fowler had personally and with great exertion fetched a sack of coals from the

greengrocer, that trader's boys being all "hout, in consekens o' bein' Christmas Heve, and everybody wantin' heverythink hall at once." He also purchased a lamp, and a few other necessities; but they had neither furniture nor crockery, and Mrs. Fowler drank her tea out of a medicine glass.

To add to their troubles, a young person who had been engaged by them as domestic servant, and was fondly believed by Mrs. Fowler to be an incarnation of all the virtues, did not put in her appearance until eleven o'clock at night; and then, finding that the furniture had not arrived, and there was no hot supper ready for her, indignantly took her departure, and stated her intention of calling on them the next day for a month's wages, as she had been "took in, and thereby lost a situation value twenty pounds a year, exclusive of beer money and perquisites."

This last revolution of Fortune's wheel completely upset Mrs. Fowler.

"I don't mind sleeping on the floor, Frederick," she sobbed, "and I am only too happy to cook your breakfast; but to be insulted by that horrid girl, and told that we had swindled her, that is really too dreadful?"

"D-d-don't mind it, my love; don't think any more about it. B-b-b-but, darling, I am afraid I must take you back to Harcourt Street again."

"Mrs. Dodds won't take us in, Frederick. You know she has let our rooms, and Mr. Everest's; and Miss Hatchard is gone, too. Besides, we can't leave all our things here."

"I will try and find a lodging for you," began Mr. Fowler, when his wife interrupted him with—

"Now, Frederick, don't talk nonsense, as if I were going to leave you all alone here. We must make the best of it, and

lie on our clothes ;” and Mrs. Fowler began to unpack her trunk with great vigour.

Just as they had put the lamp out, and were lying down in their clothes upon such other garments as they possessed, a van rumbled up the street, and a sullen knock at the door announced the arrival of their furniture. It being then nearly twelve o’clock, and the men naturally anxious to get to their homes, the Fowlers’ possessions were bundled with all despatch into the sitting-room and hall, which, but for a narrow means of exit, they completely choked ; and as none of the beds were up, and the bedding was fastened in an utterly inexplicable manner to the chairs, the owners were not much better off for its arrival that night. Nor were they very much better off next day, for neither Mr. or Mrs. Fowler had the remotest idea of the anatomy of an iron bedstead, and their

joint efforts to fix one up were in vain. Moreover, the heavier pieces of furniture were quite beyond their united strength to move. So the chest of drawers remained in the hall, at the foot of the stairs, and had to be scrambled round every time they went up or down; and the washstand was in the parlour, because the door was blocked by the chest of drawers; and the parlour-table and side-board were upside down; and the glass and china were in an unget-at-able corner; and the whole place in the direst confusion possible.

But how the Fowlers enjoyed themselves on that Christmas Day! If they had been lost in some savage wilds they could not have felt more absolutely alone than they did there, and the solitude brought to them the first feeling of perfect freedom that they had ever experienced. They were master and mistress of their own house and their

own lives, could go where they liked, and do what they liked ; there was no awful chief, no bent-upon-improvement aunt, no ill-tempered Mrs. Dodds, no prying Sarah Ann,—all was peace and bliss on that Christmas morning.

To tell of their failures and triumphs would fill a chapter : Mr. Fowler's agonies over lighting the fire, and the obstinacy of the chimney that refused to receive the smoke destined for it ; Mrs. Fowler's struggles with a broom and duster ; their united frantic efforts to place their furniture according to their desires, and the wonderful achievements in the way of picture-hanging accomplished by Mr. Fowler.

Christmas Day that year fell upon a Saturday, consequently for two days afterwards there were no shops open, and no provisions to be had ; and whether it was the freedom, or the laughter, or the hard work, is unknown, but by Monday

evening the Fowlers had eaten up nearly all their stock of provisions, and knew not where to get any more.

“There is only half a loaf of bread left, but there is plenty of tea,” said Mrs. Fowler, after a careful survey of the kitchen premises. “And, Frederick, I do *not* see what we want with a large wine cellar, when there is no place to keep the meat.”

“N-n-nor do I, my love; but it s-s-sounds well in the advertisement. ‘W-w-wine cellar and bathroom’ sounds rather spacious.”

“Yes. How nice the bathroom will be when the water is laid on! I wonder how long they will be before they bring the pipes up here. The road is in a shocking condition;” and Mrs. Fowler went to the window.

“There is a cab coming down the street,” she remarked, “and the man looks as if he were saying horrible things about the

ruts. I wonder who can be coming here in a cab. Why, it is actually stopping at our door! Oh, Frederick darling! it is Mr. Everest; and, oh dear, we haven't a room fit for him to come into!"

"Halloo!" said David from the cab, as Mr. Fowler rushed enthusiastically out of his front door and down the four feet of garden-path, and tugged violently at a gate that always shut on the least provocation and never opened without a large expenditure of physical force, "Patagonia is an over-explored country compared to this place. I have been in this cab for three hours, trying to find Tomlinson Villas."

And David got out of the cab; pulling a hamper after him, paid the cabman, and followed Mr. Fowler into the house.

"Halloo!" he exclaimed, as he came into the crowded little hall. "Have you been playing at earthquakes, or settling a

domestic difference by means of shying furniture ? ”

“ W-w-we are not quite s-s-settled yet,” said Mr. Fowler ; “ our things came so late ; b-b-but, my dear Everest, we are d-d-delighted to see you. And how did you find us out ? ”

“ I went to Mrs. Dodds, and got your address from her. I have taken the liberty of bringing Mrs. Fowler a Christmas hamper.”

“ No, really ! ” cried Mr. Fowler, beaming with delight. “ W-w-well, this is the most extraordinary c-c-c-coincidence. W-w-why, we were just out of food. I—I will call my wife. She is washing the t-t-t-tea-cups, I think. Y-y-you will have some tea, Everest ? ”

“ Thank you,” said David ; and Mr. Fowler disappeared, and shortly returned with his wife.

Their delight over the contents of the hamper, which, to say the truth, had

been packed by Mrs. Everest for her son's consumption, served to restore David's spirits a little. The Fowlers had seen that there was something wrong with him from the moment he came in; but they busied themselves with getting some tea for him, and persuading him to help them make an inroad into a fine ham that lay at the bottom of the hamper. Their happiness and good spirits and delight at seeing him cheered him a little; and when they were seated round the fire, David, in the full enjoyment of tobacco, opened his heart to them.

"I came up this afternoon," he said, in answer to their inquiries, "and I went straight to Harcourt Street, of course. I had kept on my lodgings at half rent; but I found Mrs. Dodds had been letting them to somebody else. I suppose if I had given her notice, she would have turned him out; but I came up unexpectedly and caught her."

“She told us you were not coming back,” said Mrs. Fowler. “I suppose that was to prevent us telling you of the man she had there.”

“I suppose so,” replied David; “but it doesn’t much matter. But I was surprised to find that Miss Hatchard was away;” and he looked anxiously at his hearers.

“Yes; she has gone away on business for a few days,” said Nellie. “She did not say where she was going, only that she had a commission in the country, and should not be back for some days.”

“And—and Fiametta?” asked David.

He seemed scarcely able to get the words out. Mr. Fowler rubbed his hands nervously, and Mrs. Fowler’s eyes filled with tears.

“She is gone,” she said at last.

“Gone! Gone where?” David asked huskily.

“I don’t know,” she said, almost

beginning to cry. "She went away the day after you did, very early in the morning—before we were up. We only knew of it afterwards, when I went to Miss Hatchard's to inquire about her; and she was very odd and mysterious, and would not say where she was, only that she had 'bettered herself.'"

"And you have not heard? Has not Miss Hatchard heard from her since?"

"I don't know. She will not tell me anything about her, only that she has 'bettered' herself."

"You don't even know if she is in London or not?"

"No; we know nothing about her," replied Mrs. Fowler, looking in astonishment at the change that had crept over David's face.

He had been white and thin when he came in, but that was a good deal owing to his recent illness; but now his face underwent a curious sharpening of line

and feature, a greyish shade seemed to pass over it, and he sat perfectly still, gazing at the fire.

Mrs. Fowler was frightened. She had never seen anybody look like that before. She was over-tired and nervous, too, and it was more than in her present state of health she could bear ; so she laid her head on Frederick's shoulder, and very quietly fainted.

She could have done nothing that would have roused David so effectively and quickly. With a lively recollection of his own sufferings, he stayed the distracted husband's hand in time to prevent a pitcher of water descending over the prostrate wife. Mr. Fowler had deposited her on the floor, and rushed into the kitchen for this remedy at once.

"Don't drown her," interposed David ;
"it feels so uncomfortable afterwards."

"B-b-but she will die ! Oh, Nellie, Nellie !" shrieked Mr. Fowler, in despair.

“Drowning won’t restore her, anyhow. Have you got any brandy? No? Feel in the pocket of my great coat. Heavens, man! a sandwich case doesn’t hold brandy. The other pocket. Now she will soon be all right.”

“I am better now,” said Nellie, after a few minutes, while David held her head on his arm. “Oh, Frederick darling, don’t be so unhappy!”

Frederick—this being his first acquaintance with a fainting fit—had been as nearly distracted as a mild man can be; but when he heard his wife’s voice, and saw her open her eyes, he was as instantly transported to the other extreme of joy, and the scene that followed between the pair induced David to survey the heavens from the privacy of the back kitchen door. He felt more like being out of the way there.

“I—I—I am so sorry you went away,” said Mr. Fowler, after a quarter of an

hour or so on fetching him back. "B-b-but Nellie is not very w-w-well, and I was naturally alarmed; but she is all right again now."

"Don't mention it," said David; "I am fond of astronomy. Mrs. Fowler, I am glad to see you are better."

"Yes, I am quite well now," replied Nellie; and, after a few more trifling remarks, a silence fell upon them all again.

David was clearly not at all himself that night.

"I will never rest," he said at last, apparently not heeding whether he spoke to any one or not, while he still gazed at the fire—"I will never rest until I have found her."

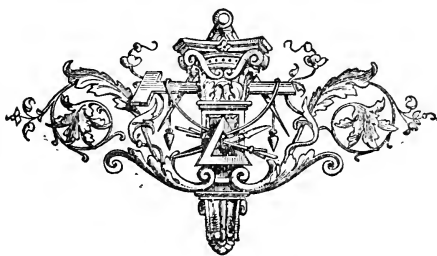
The Fowlers looked at each other. They had often speculated in the early days of their marriage as to the possibility of David's falling in love with Fiametta, but they were rather surprised to find

that he had done so ; for Miss Hatchard had shown them Fanny's portrait, and had given them her impressions regarding it ; but they said nothing of that now.

“ Miss Hatchard will be back in a week's time,” said Mrs. Fowler. “ Perhaps she will tell you more than she has told us.”

David only sighed, sighed heavily. It lay with Fiametta, not Miss Hatchard, to let him know of what had come to her. If she cared about him, he told himself, she would need no third person to go between them. So true in everything else, she could not be false in that. Her silence to him meant her indifference. Manlike, he argued from his estimation of her, and blundered accordingly. If Fiametta had not loved him, she would have written to him ; her pride and her love went hand in hand, and kept her silent as the grave towards the man of all the world whom she would have died to serve.

David stayed with the Fowlers a little longer, and then took his leave, promising to come there the next day after his office hours, and help them get their furniture into order. Before he left, however, he managed to get the refractory iron bedstead to perform its duties, so that night, at least, the Fowlers went to bed in the proper sense of the word.





CHAPTER VIII.

DAVID was very miserable when he left the Fowlers', and went towards a small hotel in the neighbourhood of Harcourt Street, where he had left his luggage for the night. His last hope with regard to Fiametta had fled.

He had learned from Sarah Ann the manner of her leaving. One evening Fiametta had been ill, a parson had been to see her. The next morning a strange woman had come very early, before Sarah Ann was up. Miss Hatchard had let her in; and before any one else in the house was stirring, Fiametta had gone. Miss Hatchard had settled about the rent with

Mrs. Dodds, and that was all that was known of her. Sarah Ann had an idea of her own on the subject, she admitted, but she was coy to part with it, until two half-crowns had found their way from David's hand to hers, and then she confided her suspicions to him.

“Miss 'Atchard was a hartist, and as sich was in league with they 'orspital folks that cut up dead people. She had seed drawings in the stugio with her own eyes of bones, and sich like. Miss 'Atchard had likely sent her to a 'orspital” in a dying state, for which she would receive some sort of bonus from the expectant carvers of bodies, who, it was well known, were in a chronic state of hunger for subjects on which to experimentalise.

David never regretted the expenditure of any money as he regretted the base use to which that five shillings had been put. With words upon his lips, the likes

of which the injured Sarah Ann remarked to Mrs. Dodds wild horses shouldn't draw from her to mention, David left the house in search of the Fowlers, there to receive such cold comfort as they could give him.

On one point, however, he felt assured—the girl was not dead. If she was dead, there could have been no reason why the Fowlers, who had been kind to her, should not have been told of it. He questioned them about the strange parson and woman who had come, but they knew nothing of the matter, and no further details could be known until Miss Hatchard's return. The whole affair was a mystery to him. He did not like to doubt Miss Hatchard or her real kindness to the girl; for, if he doubted her at all, such a hideous possibility opened itself before him that he could not bear to contemplate it for a moment. Yet, on the other hand, Miss

Hatchard had not behaved openly in the matter. The girl had been got rid of mysteriously—secretly; her few friends had been left in ignorance of her movements. What reason could have induced Miss Hatchard to act in that way? Above all, what had kept Fiametta silent?

It was a great puzzle, and the more David thought of it, the less he liked any of the possible solutions of it. Had she eluded Miss Hatchard's watchfulness, and gone out in the early morning and drowned herself, as he had feared she would do before? There was a certain terrible probability about that idea that made him shun the sight of the black silent river stealing between the streets.

Or was it possible that she had done as she had suggested she would do—gone as a model to artists' studios? Miss Hatchard could put her in the way of doing that. This possibility was nearly

as bad to him as the other. A few months ago, David would have argued quite seriously that there was nothing degrading in a woman's being an artist's model, and quoted what is generally known, with a few exceptions, to be the case, that the people employed in that profession are well-behaved, decent members of society. Now, as he thought of his beautiful, passionate love in that capacity, he consigned all artists who should dare to look at her to places unmentionable, and grew hot and cold and quivering at the bare thought.

Of her relations claiming her and protecting her, he never admitted the possibility. He had grown so utterly to disbelieve in old Mr. Thorold, that he doubted if he had any relations, and thought that the fraudulent heir and the property together were but products of a diseased brain. He knew from Fiametta herself that she had no knowledge of these

relations, nor they of her; so he never gave a thought to what was the real solution of the affair, but puzzled his brain day and night, until Miss Hatchard came back.

He had come back to his old quarters, not because Mrs. Dodds made profuse apologies, and alluded to her lonely condition as a helpless widow, spun wonderful yarns about a grasping landlord, and repeated the solemn promise of the intruding lodger that he was only going to stay a single night, with other marvellous fictions, that did great credit to her powers of imagination, but because he could not bear to leave the house that was alive with memories of his lost love. Every turn of the shabby, creaking stairs had some recollection of her about them. On the landing upstairs he had seen her last. She had come before him first at the door of his room. He recalled her as a vision of mysterious,

entrancing beauty. In reality, she had been to him then a plain, red-haired little girl, with rude manners and short frocks.

He sat in his room dreaming of her ; he went every evening to the places they had walked in together, and recalled their conversations and her looks, dwelling far more eagerly on these now than he had done then. He was not astonished that he remembered these so well, though they had apparently made such a slight impression on him at the time. Nothing connected with his worship of her could astonish him now. He had become alive to every inflexion in her voice, every movement of her figure, every glance of her eyes. An hour after any one of these walks he would scarcely have been able to recall the subject of their conversation, now he remembered every gesture that accompanied it. Truly, a flame had quickened David's spirit indeed.

He rarely went to see the Fowlers.

They had asked him to come and live with them, but he could not leave his old rooms; and instead of passing his time in the British Museum, as he had been wont to do, for the first week he stayed at home alone with his thoughts. This did not tend to improve his health, weakened by his long confinement. He grew haggard and wan; the rosy-cheeked, boyish-faced David had grown into a white-faced, wistful-eyed man.

Miss Hatchard looked at him with astonishment as he came up to the studio an hour after she arrived.

“Why, whatever ’ave you been doing to yerself?” she asked.

“Nothing. Miss Hatchard, can you tell me where she is?”

“She’s the cat’s grandmother,” said Miss Hatchard, taking off her bonnet, for she had been too busy to remove it before, and hanging it on a peg behind the door.

“Fiametta,” said David, eagerly. He had no heart even for the mildest species of chaff or retort; there was anxiety in every line of his face and figure.

“’It ’ard,” said Miss Hatchard to herself, as she shook out her jacket. “Well?” was all she remarked aloud.

“Where is she? Do you know anything about her? For God’s sake tell me, Miss Hatchard!”

“Ah! Fiametta,” said the little woman slowly, while she looked steadfastly with her small bright eyes at her visitor. “She ain’t your business, nor mine, is she?”

“You do know where she is. Why won’t you tell me?”

“Ah, that’s tellin’!” said Miss Hatchard, coolly. “Now, I don’t see what you come a rampaging up here for, before I ’ave had time so much as to have a cup of tea, asking after Fiametta, as if I kept her in a box. What do you want with Fiametta, if I might ask?”

“I want to know where she is, what she is doing. How can I help coming to you at once, when no one else can even tell me if she is alive or dead?”

“Ah,” soliloquised Miss Hatchard, inwardly, as she put the kettle on the fire, “’it ’ard; but Lor, will it last? Well, and what if I do know?” she asked aloud.

“I have been nearly three months without a word of her,” said poor David, growing desperate. “Miss Hatchard, if you have any kindness in you, tell me if she is alive.”

“Oh yes, she is alive fast enough; she ain’t one of the dying sort,” said the artist coolly. “Perhaps you thought as she was a wastin’ away for you,” she added sharply.

“No,” said David, humbly, “I don’t suppose she ever thinks of me at all. What is she doing? where is she?”

“Oh, don’t you be afeard, she is doin’ well enough.”

“She is not—she is not a model, is she?” gasped David, his worst terror finding words.

Miss Hatchard turned upon him in a rage.

“What do you mean!” she cried—“what do you mean a insultin’ a young lady! Oh, that’s your little game, is it? A model! No gent thinks much of a girl as turns model. No, she ain’t a model, nor never won’t be, I’ll go bail. She is above your thoughts and your means, young man, and you had best forget her.”

“But where is she? what is she doing? what is she living on?”

Miss Hatchard paused a moment. She saw that David would have an answer, and she hesitated as to what to tell him. Her old dislike of him was increased by his persistency, and in his question about the model she detected, as she fancied, the key-note to his inquiries. He could not mean to marry

her—gentlemen do not usually marry girls they think may have taken up with the trade of a professional model at Fiametta's age. She believed he only desired to find the girl to gratify a passing fancy. So she deliberated over her answer for some time.

"Fiametta is bein' took care of," she said at last, slowly, "by some ladies—real ladies—the genuine article; and they are kind to her, and she gets along all right. She don't ask after you, nor you needn't after her. She ain't coming back here no more, nor I ain't a going to tell you where she is, and that's flat; for you won't do her no good, and might only unsettle her mind."

"Unsettle her mind!" cried David, a wild hope flashing across him for an instant. "Oh, Miss Hatchard, you can't mean——"

"I don't mean nothin' at all," interposed Miss Hatchard, savagely, "except

that it's best for her to forget all her life here. It can't be very pleasant remembrance for her, and the sight of you, or me," she added, with a jerk, "might bring it back to her. Can't you see that?"

"I can see what you mean, but I don't believe that Fiametta can ever wish to forget part of her life or to ignore it. It is only weak and ignoble minds that can do that. It is a mean way of putting out of sight things that can never be undone, and that leave their mark on all the future. I will never believe that Fiametta wishes to forget. You are deceiving me, and, I believe, have deceived her. I will never rest until I find out where she is;" and, without even saying "good night," David turned and left the room, and Miss Hatchard heard him go downstairs and out into the street.

She sat drinking her tea in somewhat disturbed thoughtfulness. David had

been more earnest and determined in the recent interview than she had believed was possible to him, and when he said that he would never rest until he had found Fiametta, she had a vague misgiving that he would keep his word. There had been a time when she had thought that David's position was so far above Fiametta's that he would not marry her; now it seemed to her that Fiametta ought to make a much better marriage than to take a badly paid government clerk for a husband.

It was solely with Fiametta that her thoughts and her sympathies lay. She had no anxiety about David's feelings, in fact she took a somewhat malicious pleasure in his sufferings, for she adhered firmly to her belief that he meant badly by the girl.

The change in Fiametta's life and prospects was to her a source of the purest joy. All the affection of a

naturally warm heart that a hard battling life amid ignoble things and ever-pressing poverty had left to her was poured out upon the once desolate friendless girl. It was as unselfish a love as could well be. She had given all and received nothing from the very beginning ; but there often dwells in women, for women, a love almost as deep and strong as that of a woman for her lover. It is not often found among married women, but such devotion is a commoner thing than is generally believed among those whom the world is only too ready to laugh at as loveless old maids, in whom the milk of human kindness has run dry.

Miss Hatchard's love for Fiametta had all the romance and fascination for her of a girl's first love for a young man. All the grace and beauty that had shone upon her lonely life had come from this girl. She would willingly have become her handmaid and followed her over the

world. That David, even if he were really in love with her, should be sacrificed for her good, was just as it should be. Fiametta was as far above him now in station as she had been below him in worldly wealth in her father's lifetime, and Miss Hatchard was determined to keep them apart.





CHAPTER IX.

DAVID could extract nothing further from Miss Hatchard about Fiametta, and he soon saw that it was useless to try and do so. Search was equally useless, for the whole world lay before him in which to prosecute his inquiries; besides, he had other things to do, but he cherished a hope so strong that it soon amounted to conviction that he should meet her again some day.

Full of this hope, and deeply impressed by the devotion she showed towards the cause of the suffering poverty-stricken portion of our large towns, David began to do what he had never done before—to

look around him. It had never occurred to him to contemplate his fellow-man, unless they happened to be his friends, or to interest him personally. He had never felt the slightest interest in the great body of outsiders. Now he began to look at them, to think about them, and not only to think about them, but to think with them, a far more difficult and instructive process.

He did as Fiametta had done before him, and wandered about the streets and lanes of lower London. Much of what he saw there and what he heard would be unfit to set down in such a book as this, but some of the details relating to the employment of women and children, terrible though they are, can surely not be amiss, old though the story may be.

In some of the eastern parishes he found children of seven years old employed from early morning till late night in sack making, for which they received

one farthing a sack. One woman, with a sick husband and a little child, worked at finishing shirts, for which she received threepence a dozen; by the utmost efforts she could only earn sixpence a day, out of which she found her own thread. In one underground kitchen he found seven people living, and a little dead child lying in a corner. There also he found match-box-makers, whose industry was paid at the rate of twopence-farthing a gross, the workers finding their own fire to dry the boxes by and their own paste and string.

The ordinary rate of wages for certain branches of employment was as follows:—

Making shirts, twopence each, and find the cotton. Six could be done in a day, by working from 6 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Making paper bags, fourpence-half-penny a thousand.

Making button-holes, threepence half-penny for three dozen.

But why continue the list? These are facts easily enough to be verified or obtained from any worker among the poor in London, and few people care about the details, however much the main facts may interest them. Suffice it to say, that David found women, mothers of families, working fifteen and sixteen hours a day, and earning between seven and nine shillings a week.

In a very little while he saw and heard enough in the district between the Strand and Holborn, in Bermondsey, St. George's-in-the-East, and many other parts of London, to explain to him much that he had considered wild and fanciful in Fiametta's ideas. And as he went about among the people, her image was ever in his mind. No wonder, he thought, that she should have in her ignorance turned against the rich, when she had the sight of these poor before her eyes day after day.

It was the women who interested him most, because of that one woman who so longed to give her life for others' good. He began by being full of pity for them, but that pity soon turned to a righteous indignation on their behalf. He threw himself heart and soul into the work of helping these women who so nobly help themselves. What must the temptation to sin be when a woman must work sixteen hours a day to earn only seven shillings a week?

He found a few people engaged in the work—clergymen, a few ladies—noble and self-sacrificing in their lives, and willing to spend their lives in others' service; but they one and all shrank from David's proposal of how to help these women. He thought over his proposal long and seriously before he put it forward to any one. While Fiametta was sitting beside her window in Chaylesford, David was turning over his scheme in his

mind, and eagerly collecting facts and details that would bear it out. At last he came to the conclusion that it was the only one that would really meet the wants of those women, but the difficulty of application was very great. His scheme was nothing more or less than to organise a complete system of trades-unions among the working women of London.

When he had quite convinced himself that this was the best way in which to work, he unfolded his plan to his coadjutors. They all were horrified at it. Clergymen, Scripture-readers, lady-workers, sisters of charity, dissenting ministers, philanthropists—they were all shocked. It seemed the thin end of a most objectionable wedge: women would be organised to revolt against men, society could never stand if such a thing was to be tolerated.

Besides, they all said, it will never

answer. Women cannot combine together as men can ; women have not the power of united action that men have.

“That all depends on the leaders,” David would reply. “Men do not unite unless they have a good general who knows how to keep them in order. Besides, experience shows that they can unite.”

“But they won’t do it,” they urged ; “the masters of the shops will be too strong for them. It will only result in those who are at present employed being thrown out of work, and others being taken in. The women are too timid to risk it ;” and this last objection proved true.

David set boldly to work. One or two among the helpers of the poor he managed to convert by his arguments and his earnestness, and together they began their propaganda. But the women were too timid. They listened, admired sometimes,

deprecatd at others ; but the answer was always the same—the master would discharge them, and there was a hungry file of waiting women only too eager to fill their places. David grew almost sick with horror as he heard the women talk, while he watched their long fingers flying about their sewing. The pressure for work seemed so dreadful, that he almost felt like sending women out into the cold to die when he talked to them of risking their situations. There was no chance for a woman who once got crowded out. Every seamstress's place was watched by eager-famishing eyes of other women. He felt like a man fighting against an army.

But he went on with his work. He preached and talked to the women ; he showed them his plan ; he unfolded the history of the men's trades-unions to them. He tried talking to the masters ; but very little came of that, for he was always met by the remark, " We pay the

regular price of labour that is settled by the law of demand and supply."

"But we mean to regulate that law," he would reply, "as the men have done. Why should women be worked for starvation wages when men are not?"

"You must organise your scheme before we shall pay any attention to it," the masters would reply. And David would leave them with a heavy doubt about his heart.

In sober earnest David's scheme did not work well. He got very few adherents, and those few were among the least capable of the "hands" employed. The women who had situations were not disposed to risk them, and nearly all the women were timid and distrustful of the plan proposed to them. Women who had no employment were not likely to join; for they would have taken work, if it had been offered them, at almost any price; moreover, if they had joined they would

have been very little, if any, good to the association.

But David was not going to be lightly discouraged. He believed in his work, and in the ultimate success of it. Moreover, having set his hand to do this thing, he was going to carry it out. That dogged obstinacy of which his mother had often complained showed itself here. He went on with it, much as he had gone on in earlier days with his study of languages and liturgies, partly because he was not going to be beaten by difficulties that turned up in his path, partly because, it must be said, that he felt that Fiametta would approve of what he was doing. How often he longed for her help cannot be said. Whenever he failed—and that was generally—he felt that had she been with him he might have been successful. She was precisely the woman for the work he had in hand. Her beauty, a powerful influence from one woman to another; her

enthusiasm ; her devotion ; her nameless subtle influence, that mysteriously attracted every one who came near her ;—all would have helped forward his scheme as nothing else could have done. In his mind he constantly pictured her in those squalid houses of dirt and starvation and misery, telling the wan-eyed skeletons of famished women of hope and deliverance from their more grinding toil. He fancied how those dull eyes would gradually kindle with some of the fire from hers ; how the force of her great courage and devotion would stir their feeble lives ; and how at last, in a torrent of enthusiasm, they would draw all the suffering and the poor and the struggling together, such an army of misery, and famine, and weakness, and helplessness, as has never been seen on the face of the earth before, but strong with a common purpose and a common appeal to humanity and right and justice, not an appeal from man to

man, but of women and children to sons and husbands and fathers.

It was this hope that kept him so hard at his post. He never went to the Museum ; he no longer passed his evenings in study. From his office he went eastward, and there, night after night, he struggled to draw the timid, shrinking women into his harbour of refuge. Not that he contented himself with trying that alone. There were hundreds of ways in which he could help them, and he did help them. Sometimes by sparing the hardworked mother of a family the necessity of losing some precious hours of work, by having to procure needful articles for her trade at some distant place ; sometimes it might be only to fetch a pennyworth of lamp oil when the children were asleep, and the weary work had to be finished that night. What would Fanny have thought to see her once possible husband running down a dirty court in

the East End with an old preserved meat tin in his hand for a pennyworth of lamp oil? It was not a dignified position, but surely a merciful one.

He did other errands than those as well. Sometimes he would intercede for a poor woman with her employer, when by some mishap she had failed to please him. Often he would get some sort of honest employment, badly paid as it was, for young girls just out of childhood—anything to keep them from the streets. He soon became very well known among a certain class of workers, and there was many a girl who could date her entrance into an honest life from the time when David met her; many a woman who had had actual starvation warded from her by his kindly interference on her behalf.

As he went on he became more and more interested in his work; but he was sadly in need of help, for the time that he could give was necessarily very limited.

Religious help he did not want, great and beneficial as it was ; it did not help, but rather retarded his course of action. Obedience, submission, faith in a future that will more than counterbalance the ills of this life, are what religion teaches to the poor. A beautiful and pure teaching, but not the teaching that will rouse women to struggle for a freer and better existence on this earth. David left their souls to the ministers appointed to look after them, he only concerned himself about their bodies. He was more zealous for an open window, than for reading them a chapter of the Bible ; more desirous that they should have fairer wages for their work, than that they should prepare themselves for the life to come. Life was not long enough for him to try and save their bodies and souls, and as there were plenty of people to look after their souls, he mainly concerned himself about their needs in this life.

Interested though he was in his work, he could scarcely be said to be happy in it. The sight of hundreds of starving women toiling day and night for bare bread in the midst of the most squalid and loathsome surroundings is not a beautiful sight, nor one calculated to charm the senses in any way. It was enough to send a sympathetic, tender-hearted man to bed intensely miserable every night, especially if he had lost the only woman in the world he had loved, or was ever likely to love. Her desertion of him was an abiding mystery and grief to him, and as the spring days came round, the days when they had had those long twilight walks and talks together, the pain of her loss to him became deeper and deeper.

And what had become of Fanny and Mrs. Everest? After David had come back to London, and had arranged with Fanny's remaining guardian about her

affairs, that young lady betook herself to her own home, Mrs. Everest, at her especial desire, accompanying her. There they had lived ever since. The furniture at the Rectory had been sold, and the proceeds David had invested for his mother. Of other personal property the old rector had left none behind him, except his books, which he had bequeathed to his nephew, and David had had them removed to London.

Mrs. Everest, after her final disappointment about her son, had concerned herself very little about him for some time. She did write to him in January to come down for Fanny's birthday; but he said he could not leave London again so soon, whereupon Mrs. Everest's last flicker of hope went out. She felt certain, then, that Fanny would accept Mr. Lethbury; and Fanny did do so, just at the beginning of Lent.

Fanny was not in love with Mr. Leth-

bury, but she liked him, and she found him an amiable and pleasant companion, a weak-spirited one, it is true ; but, then, if a woman cannot marry the man she loves, at least let her marry one she can manage. Perhaps, too, she wished to show David that she was not pining for him. Moreover, life was so very, very quiet at Broodleigh, that almost any change was welcome, and being married would certainly bring about that desirable end.

To say that Mrs. Everest was disappointed and angry and indignant, would be but a faint description of her state of mind. She had dreaded and abhorred the idea of this marriage from the first, for as long as Fanny and David were both unmarried there was always a chance, especially as they grew older, that such old friends would marry. Impolitic though it was, in a flood of angry tears she announced her determination of

leaving the Hall, when Fanny told her of her engagement.

“I do not think I would do that, if I were you, mamma,” replied Fanny, quietly; “because, you know, people might say you were disappointed that I did not marry David.”

“And you had much better have done so,” retorted Mrs. Everest, fiercely. She was too angry to be prudent. “Much better. David, with all his faults, is more of a man than——”

“You forget that I am engaged to Mr. Lethbury,” interposed Fanny, quietly. She was not angry with Mrs. Everest, for she, too, had thought it would have been much better to marry David; but she tried to put such thoughts away from her now, as it was her duty to do so. “Dear mamma, I know, of course, that you would have liked me for your daughter, and you have always been as a mother to me; but because I marry

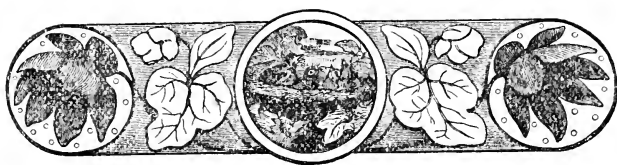
some one else, do not let us part in anger. Mr. Lethbury and I both hope that we shall still see a great deal of you. In any case, I do not think you will desert me just now, when I need you more than ever."

Mrs. Everest wiped her eyes and tried to calm herself down a little. What Fanny had said showed good sense and a certain kindness of feeling, and it was well that she should respond to her advances. Besides, she was really fond of the girl, who had been her sole companion for years. Her anger was against David after all, not against the girl, who she knew had loved him.

"You must excuse a mother's feelings, Fanny," she said, wiping some hot drops from her eyes. "It is hard to give you up to some one else. I had hoped you would have been my daughter, Fanny, in reality; but, of course, I do not wish to force yours or David's inclinations.

You have chosen otherwise. I hope you will be very happy, my dear ; ” and the two women kissed each other, and cried a little together, neither of them talking, but both thinking of David.





CHAPTER X.

THE announcement of Fanny's engagement was made by Mrs. Everest to her son. The letter which contained the news was a bitter and sad one; for Mrs. Everest was at this time a sad and bitter woman; and since Mr. Burney's death, her religion had taken several strange and wonderful departures from that narrow path of evangelical straightness in which she had walked for so long. She had become a somewhat fierce temperance advocate, which meant, of course, a most intemperate zeal for total abstinence, an instance of the wonderful misuse of language that will surely puzzle our

descendants, should any so-called temperance publications exist for the perusal of future ages.

It was not to be expected that Mrs. Everest, having this mighty truth at her disposal, should tolerate the performance of any other kind of mission by anybody else. She heard of David's work in London, and sent him enormous bundles of temperance tracts to scatter broadcast as he went, which, however, promised to keep him in pipe lights for the rest of his life instead, and she urged her son at the same time to abandon his wicked, radical, irreligious trades-union, and take up with the suppression of the burning evil of the day, etc. As David refused to accede to such a request, she positively inundated him with pamphlets and leaflets, until David fell into a habit of never opening any parcels that came by post, and they lay in neglected heaps in the corners of his rooms.

“I understand now,” Mrs. Everest wrote, “why you did not ask Fanny’s hand in honourable marriage. Your mind has been warped and vitiated by your horrible ideas—Socialist ideas, I call them—about trades-unions, teaching the poor to rebel against those who are lawfully set over them, and encouraging atheism and revolution, and making them think that they are as good as their masters. With all these horrible ideas in your mind, I should not wonder if you had become a Socialist yourself, and disapproved of marriage, and everything that is right and proper. I am sure it is only what I might expect of you, seeing your rebellious nature from your youth up. Not that I ever expected you to listen to *me*, but you might remember your poor dear uncle, and think how grieved he would be to see you a Revolutionist, and going about in a red cap, as I dare say you do, and going to mass

meetings, and all sorts of dreadful things. I dare say you will be sent to prison at last; and then, when it is too late, you will remember your mother's warnings, and think of the sweet girl you have lost."

David's reply to this letter was very short and very concise.

"I am neither a Socialist nor a Revolutionist," he said; "nor do I encourage the poor to revolt against their masters, in the ordinary sense of the word, but only to get fair wages for fair work. I shall not distribute temperance tracts among them. A woman who receives twopence for making a man's shirt, buttonholes and all, has learnt the lesson you wish to inculcate more thoroughly than your books will teach her. In fact, my teaching leads them to expect that in the process of time they may have pints of beer with their dinners, instead of cold water; and if you lived on bread and dripping, as most of them do, you might

find the beer not altogether unacceptable either."

To Fanny he wrote a long letter of congratulations and kind wishes, and said all the pleasant things he could about her future husband ; and, this done, he settled down to his work again, perhaps a little sorer at heart, yet relieved, too, to think that Fanny had so soon consoled herself.

Arithmetic all day, apparently useless pleading half the night in foul rooms, disturbed visions of Fiametta's terror-stricken face, as when last he saw her, for the rest of the night, made up the sum of David's life. It was not cheerful, could scarcely be said to be very interesting, but he went on with his work.

In March he went down to Broodleigh for Fanny's wedding. That ceremony was attended with great festivities, as became the marriage of the Lady of the Manor. Mr. Lethbury, too, was tremendously brightened up for the occasion, and

was as happy as a consumptive bridegroom with an irrepressible cough can ever be said to be.

“He won’t last long,” whispered Mrs. Everest to her son. “How Fanny could ever like such a hop-pole of a man I cannot understand!”

“He is a very good fellow,” said David, “and, I am sure, will make her a good husband.”

“Bah!” said Mrs. Everest, snappishly. “Make her a good husband! There isn’t enough of him to make more than a shadow of one. A good husband, indeed! He will let Fanny do whatever she likes!”

“Then he will be a truly admirable husband,” returned David, laughing. “Now, my dear mother, the question is—what is to become of you? Shall I look out for a small house, or take lodgings for us both in London?”

This conversation took place at the Hall the night before the wedding. Fanny

and Mr. Lethbury were walking up and down the path outside the drawing-room window. David and his mother were inside, she sitting in the window, where she could countenance Fanny's proceedings by a fiction of being present in the flesh, though absent in the spirit. David was lying on the sofa, with his hands under his head, in his old lazy attitude. It was the first time he had lain on a sofa since he had left Broodleigh.

"I am afraid you don't like London," David went on, as his mother returned no answer to his question. "If so, we might find a small house in the suburbs."

"No, I don't like London," said Mrs. Everest; but she did not seem to be thinking much of what was said to her.

"I am afraid I shall always be obliged to live there," said David, gently, "unless the Irish patriots disestablish the Government, in return for what we did to the

Irish Church ; then, if there is enough of me left to walk about with, I shall have to look out for another situation."

"Fanny has asked me," said Mrs. Everest, "to stay on here until after midsummer."

"Very kind indeed of her," said David, "just what Fanny would do ; but I hardly imagine you will care to do so."

"Why not?" snapped Mrs. Everest, turning upon him suddenly. "Do you suppose Fanny has no more affection for me, or I for her, than you have?"

"I was thinking of her," said David, meekly. "Of course I have no experience in such things, but there is a popular superstition that newly married people like to be left to themselves."

"Newly married fiddlestick!" said Mrs. Everest, contemptuously.

There was silence for a few moments, David perceiving that his mother had some plan in her head that she had not

yet disclosed to him. Her next question somewhat surprised him.

“David,” said Mrs. Everest, in a tone of voice the solemnity of which seemed inappropriate to the remark, “how old do you consider I am?”

“Old? Well, I don’t know, mother. Fifty?”

Mrs. Everest flashed upon him with indignation.

“Fifty! thank you, David. I dare say I seem an old woman to you, though I do not seem so to everybody;” and Mrs. Everest drew her slight figure up to its full height.

“You are uncommonly well preserved, of course,” blundered David, a little disconcerted and extremely surprised; for his mother had never shown any signs of youthful desires in her dress or manner, indeed, she had always insisted on her “experience” having been very deep and varied on a large number of subjects, and

that does not convey an idea of youthfulness. He had not made matters any better by his last remark, however.

“Well preserved!” she exclaimed. “Well, really, David, I have never before been insulted by being told I was going off.”

“Well, how old are you?” asked David.

“Forty-three,” said Mrs. Everest, in a severely judicial manner, as if she merely granted the information out of consideration for her son’s weakness, not on any other account. “Forty-three, when *some* people, David, consider a woman to be in her prime.”

“Ah,” said David, thinking of Fiametta, and her girlish loveliness—“ah, I don’t agree with them.”

“Well, really, David, of all the rude things——”

“I didn’t mean to be rude,” interposed David, meekly. “Is there any young

lady of forty-three you wish to present to me as my youthful bride ? ”

“ Really, David, you are too provoking, just when I wanted to speak seriously to you on a matter most intimately connected with my—— But there, you never did and never will feel the slightest interest in anything connected with your poor mother. I have known that for many years ; ” and Mrs. Everest, from the force of long habit, took out her handkerchief and applied it to her eyes, although it was not needed.

“ I did not know there was any particular interest attached to your being forty-three,” answered David ; “ it’s very like being forty-two or forty-four, I should imagine, unless you come into a large property at that age, in which case it would be a very interesting age—remarkably so. But tell me what the interest is, mother.”

“ It would serve you right if I did not

do anything of the kind," answered Mrs. Everest; "but as you are now grown up, and seem determined to take your own way in the world (Oh, David! the good you might have done with those tracts I sent you; but you always were rebellious), I suppose I may as well, especially as your poor uncle is dead, treat you as a rational and responsible person—though when you will become so is a mystery to me—— David, you have seen Mr. Fosbrook?"

"What, the new rector?" asked David, growing more and more bewildered as his mother went on. "Yes; what of him?"

"I should like to know," continued Mrs. Everest, folding her hands, and looking somewhat benignly upon her son, "what you think of him?"

"That he is very fat and very stupid," said David, "and that he has had so many good things to eat at the college dinners, that he has not digested them

yet, but they have got into his system, and made him incapable of seriously regarding anything except past, present, and future dinners. Any designing person could make him do anything he or she liked."

"Thank you, David," said Mrs. Everest, rising with great dignity, and gathering her dress about her with a stately sweep. "Thank you, David. I have now borne, I think, all that a mother can be called upon to bear from a son. Every form of insult has now been heaped upon my head; every indignity that ingratitude and irreligion and wantonness can suggest has now been bestowed upon me. *This*, David, I shall not forget. I have borne too much already; for the present I will seek for comfort and strength where alone it is to be found—in prayer for the son who so wilfully insults a widowed mother;" and in spite of David's protestations and questions, Mrs. Everest swept from the room and upstairs into her own chamber.

David, left alone, tried to puzzle out the conundrum as best he could. He could only suppose that she was worried and anxious, or perhaps had been overworked about Fanny's wedding, and long experience had taught him that any sort of pretence would do for Mrs. Everest to fix a quarrel on; so the new Rector of Broodleigh, or rather his description of him, troubled him very little that night.

Neither did the Rector's presence the next day at the wedding breakfast trouble him very much. The wedding to David was rather a ghostly ceremony. There seemed to him something hollow and unreal about it. As Fanny's oldest friend, he stood in the office of father to her on this occasion, and gave her away. It seemed a literal carrying out of what is often a mere figurative custom. He had given Fanny away, for she had been his in heart for many a year. Her red eyes made him

very unhappy. Fanny must have been a good deal upset to have appeared on her wedding morning with red eyes. In point of fact, Fanny had over-calculated her attachment to her new lover, or underrated her love for her old one. David's presence had brought back many an old dream that his absence might have allowed to die away in obscurity. But she was a girl born to do her duty, and she meant to do it. They were the last tears she shed over her old love; but David somehow felt that they were shed for him, and the knowledge made him miserable. When he drove with her from the Hall to the church, and saw the traces of tears upon her pale face, and noted the trembling of her hands, he was so overcome by tenderness for his old playfellow, and by remorse, that nothing short of giving up Fiametta kept him from offering to lay his life at her disposal even then. But false to Fiametta he could not be. It

was no matter if she loved him or not. She was all the goodness of life to him, and neither lands, nor friendships, nor pity, nor old recollections could make him for an instant false to her.

“Dear Fanny,” he said, “he is a good fellow, and you will be very happy.” It seemed a stupid thing to say, but he could think of nothing else.

Fanny made no reply, only wiped away her remaining tears, and laid her hand upon his arm as he helped her out of the carriage, and they walked up the church together.

Mrs. Everest, of course, was there, and such of the neighbouring gentry as had known Fanny’s parents and wished to do what they could towards making her wedding-day a pleasant one. The usual accompaniment of enthusiastic school children and village sightseers filled the little church ; and somewhere in a corner by the altar rails was a bridegroom, looking

as lamentably out of place as bridegrooms generally do.

The wedding over, and the speeches and the breakfast over, and the bride, now quite recovered, and the bridegroom, now very important, as bridegrooms are when their moment of victory comes and they carry their brides away from relations and friends, having departed to the nearest station *en route* for Italy, and the guests having gone, David stole out for a quiet pipe and ramble in the garden.

Mrs. Everest seemed to have been smitten by the same desire (for a ramble, not for a pipe), for she, too, was walking about in a secluded part of the garden, after the last carriage had rolled away, containing, as David thought, the last guest; but here he was mistaken.

He went up to her, by way of showing her a little attention after his scolding last night, and began to talk about the wedding festivities, and praised the

domestic arrangements, which he knew had been managed by her, with a view to making his presence agreeable to her. But to his surprise his advent seemed in no wise to suit that good lady, indeed she seemed quite annoyed with him for being there, and took everything he said in such very ill part that David began to fear he had really offended her very seriously, and was quite at a loss to discover in what way he could have done so. Being, however, really anxious about her future, and wishing to know what she desired to do, he persisted in endeavouring to get her into a better temper, but with such a very small amount of success that he was driven at last into saying he thought he would go down to the church, and see how the ringers were getting on.

His proposal to go away was hailed with such evident relief by Mrs. Everest that he was more than ever mystified, and had he not happened to turn his

head when he got to the other end of the walk, he might have remained mystified for the rest of the day.

As he was leaving the flower garden by one end, a portly figure came into it from the other end—came into it in a leisurely manner, as if he had intended to come there, and was not surprised at finding either himself or Mrs. Everest there now. He took that lady's hand, indeed, as if it belonged to him, and not only took it, but carried it to his lips ; and had not Mrs. Everest snatched it away hastily, seeing that David had remained rooted to the gravel walk, he might have put it in his arm.

But David had seen quite enough. He understood his mother's anger last night, her objection to his presence in the garden now. He turned angrily, and went away with long swinging strides out of the gardens and out of the park, away to the little copse at the back of

the Rectory, that seemed to belong to nobody but the wild birds and flowers. But as he strode along his anger lessened ; and as he climbed over the hedge into the copse, the comicality of the scene he had just left occurred to him, and he roared with laughter. The fat, heavy rector, his simpering tenderness ; the prim little lady's mingled pleasure at seeing him, and indignation at there being a spectator of their meeting ;—all amused him vastly, when he had once began to see things from this point of view.

“After all, I don't think she could do better,” he said to himself. “She would hate London life, and leaving here would be very hard to her. She will be very happy with him to manage, and Fanny at the Hall.”

So David greeted his mother with a ceremonious bow, when he met her at the Hall door when he came back.

She coloured a little and looked de-

fiantly at him, as if not quite sure whether he was mocking her or in earnest.

“I withdraw my expressions of last night,” he said gravely; “they were spoken in jest. Might I—might I presume to congratulate?” and he came forward and put his arm round her shoulder and kissed her.

“It is for your sake, David,” she said.

David thought it wise not to question the accuracy of this remark, so he let it go.

“I hope you will be happy,” he said.

Mrs. Everest had had some very bitter things on her tongue when she saw David come to the door, but she suppressed them all now. For the first time she noticed that he was looking pale and thin, and that the light had gone out of his eyes that had dwelt there of old.

“You will marry some day, David,” she said. “You will be better without me.”

David shook his head, but did not reply, and nothing more was said on the subject between them. He went back to London the next day, and she remained at the Hall to await Fanny's return, and to prepare for her own return to the old home in which she had so long been mistress.





CHAPTER XI.

FIAMETTA, lying on her bed at Chaylesford during the winter months, was recovering from brain fever as slowly as a patient in whom no natural love of life exists can recover. She had been half starved for so many years, during which she had shot up tall and pale, like a plant reared in a cellar, that she had no native strength to hold out against the consuming fever in her brain.

Had not a vague and frightful sense of being involved in a great crime hung over her bewildered mind, the food and care that was lavished upon her might have wrought better results. She was

too weak and shattered to have any clear idea of what she had done ; only a nameless horror wrapped her round, and kept her in the shadow of a great terror.

She had become much more gentle in her manner. The old, hard abruptness, the result of her struggling wretched life, had fallen off from her, as a husk from some sweet fruit. This change was partly owing to her being for the first time in her life among ladies, and partly because the old bitter feeling against a hard and cruel world was now turned in upon herself. In her own eyes she was the lowest of all creatures—a woman false to her principles, a woman sunk to the depths of shame by the commission of some formless crime, and by loving a man who scorned her.

Unhappily for her peace of mind, there was no doubt about this latter point. Day and night David's face was before her, and the tones of his voice were in her

ears. Doubtful as she was about everything else, she never doubted that she loved him; and as she loved him, so she hated herself.

One has need to take into consideration the state of Fiametta's mind during the years in which she was growing from grave childhood into graver womanhood, to understand the loathing with which she regarded herself for this last thing. To her the love of one person meant robbery from humanity. In the narrowness and ignorance that came of her surroundings, she never saw that the divine saying, "If a man love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?" may be applied quite as well to love for individuals as compared with that for humanity at large.

In point of fact, had her brain been stronger she could never have loved her less fortunate brothers and sisters so well

at any time of her life as she did now. She had sympathised with them always, but it was with a fierce indignant sympathy, that was at times akin to scorn for their weakness and want of purpose. Now, in her sufferings, she could have been loving over the lowest and most fallen of her sex. The capacity for great tenderness had always been in her, but it had been clouded over by the harsh, cruel surroundings of her life. Now, as she lay in her anguish upon her bed, the natural beauty of her nature little by little revealed itself to those about her.

She did not say much to them in words of her gratitude for their goodness to her; in set words she never thanked them at all. But her eyes would follow them when they left her, and all her feeble powers were exerted to clasp their hands as they bent over her in the mornings, after her long and troublous nights were passed.

It was to Irene that she turned most. She clung to her as she had never clung to any one before. There was a deep and mysterious sympathy between them, that arose chiefly from Irene's ready divination that she had a painful secret hidden in her breast. Irene knew that something weighed upon her cousin's mind, though she never tried to guess it; and Fiametta knew that she knew, and even at times tried in her dazed, bewildered way to tell her what it was. She was impelled to do this by her knowledge as she grew stronger of the love in which she was held by her relations, and she was conscious that she was receiving this affection under false pretences.

This constant struggling to free herself of the hallucinations that haunted her, and to arrange her thoughts in due order, often plunged her into terrible fits of brooding melancholy, inexplicable to

those about her. For days together she would lie trying to unravel the mystery that clung like a veil about her mind. At such times she seemed incapable of speech or hearing ; all the bruised powers of her mind were concentrated in the struggle for the truth she vainly sought. Her friends at these times feared that a settled melancholy would abide with her, and with good cause they trembled for her reason.

It was Irene who generally succeeded in leading her out of this Valley of the Shadow of Death. In her struggles to get at the truth, and in her endeavours to impart some of the partial knowledge she had to her cousin, the poor girl's state was piteous indeed ; but Irene's tenderness, her caresses, her gentle soothing, would often have their desired effect.

“ I do not know,” Fiametta would say, looking piteously at her.

“Do not try and think, darling ; it will all come right in time.”

“No, no ; it can never come right,” she would reply. And then Irene would soothe her into a quieter state, or get her, if possible, to go to sleep.

As she grew able to sit up, Mr. Thorold often passed part of the afternoon in her room. His quiet presence always had a good effect upon her, and she was often able to listen to his conversation, and could even sometimes bear a part in it.

One day, in that worst of weathers, a snowy March, when she was seeming better than usual, he ventured upon a subject he had never before mentioned to her.

“My dear,” he said, “if it is not too painful to you, I wish to speak to you of your father.”

He stopped abruptly, for a sudden painful change rushed over the girl’s face, a change akin to terror. Her eyes

dilated, her lips parted. If she had seen a ghost she could not have looked more aghast.

“My poor child!” he said tenderly, “I had no idea I should give you such pain. I will say no more.”

“Yes; go on!” she gasped. “Have you found it out?”

“That is what I wish to speak to you about, my dear. Do not look so terrified, so distressed. Believe me, you are to me as one of my own daughters;” and he laid his hand upon her head.

Her lips moved, but she was unable to speak. He could not account for her agitation, and, in truth, it a little shocked him. Was it possible that this pathetic-eyed girl cared so much for money that she desired to rob his children of theirs?

“I have been investigating,” he said gravely, “all your father’s papers, copies, and notes, and diligently hunting up all the records and deeds I could find re-

lating to our joint ancestors. I think you will believe me, Fiametta, when I assure you on my honour as a gentleman and a clergyman that there is nothing, absolutely nothing, to be found that in any way supports your father's claim to the property of Chaylesford. If I had ever had any doubts—which I never had—of my perfect and entire right to the property I hold, they would be set at rest now. I do not say this on my own authority alone, but I have employed the best experts in such matters that could be found, and they are unanimous in declaring that your poor father had not a shadow of a claim ; that even if old John Thorold, on whom he seems to have founded his claim, did marry and leave children, and he was descended from them, that would only affect the title, not the property ; for that has come down direct from Robert, John's eldest brother, through his son, his son's

daughter, who kept her maiden name, to her son, who was my grandfather, your father being descended from a younger son of my great grandfather's. I can find no proof of the double descent that he claimed. If you would like to see the pedigree and the papers relating to it, I will bring them to you.

“And now for yourself, my dear, I have placed six thousand pounds in your name in good securities, to be yours absolutely to do as you like with. As regards your home, you will, I trust, feel that you are here on exactly the same footing as Irene and Cecily, that this is your home as it is theirs. My dear, what is the matter?” for Fiametta started up with a passionate gesture, and then sank back again among her pillows.

He was greatly alarmed, and was about to call some one, but she stayed him with her hand.

“Is that all? oh, is that all? is that all?” she cried, fixing her wild, dilated eyes upon his face, and grasping his wrist with all the strength she had.

“All!” he repeated, in astonishment. It was a strange question to ask him, after what he had said to her. “Yes, that is all, I think,” he added slowly; for he was mystified and somewhat hurt.

Her only answer was to fling her arms up above her head.

“Oh, I don’t know what it is! I don’t know what it is!” she cried, and then her arms dropped, and her face fell forward. He caught her in his arms, and called loudly for Irene, who came running in.

“She has fainted, I think,” he said.

When Irene came downstairs, he asked her if she could explain Fiametta’s wild cry and her looks of terror.

“She is often so,” Irene replied; “there is something weighing heavily

upon her mind, and she is not strong enough to know what it is."

"Poor child!" he sighed, thinking of his first interview with her. "I fear I ought not to have mentioned her father. We must use all care and tenderness with her."

For some days after this interview, one of Fiametta's brooding fits of melancholy rested heavily upon her. The struggle within her to grasp the truth of what she had done was painful to witness. For days she groped about in the dim caverns of her mind, and the groping was a pain and terror to her. Now and then she would speak to Irene, not very often, and when she did it was difficult to understand what she meant, for her words were but the continuation of the bewilderment in her brain; but once or twice she alluded to Miss Hatchard.

"Would you like to see her, dear?" asked Irene.

“She could tell me,” she replied at last, after a long and painful effort to put her ideas into words. It was the more difficult for her to do, as in these last few days a new idea had come to her. Miss Hatchard could tell her what had become of David. Was he dead, or had he forsaken her? If he had forsaken her, it must mean that she was guilty.

She looked so wild and haggard that Irene feared to question her any further, but told her parents what had occurred. So in a very few days Miss Hatchard made her appearance at Chaylesford, accompanied by a vast collection of canvasses, and a very small carpet-bag containing her limited wardrobe.

The excitement of Miss Hatchard’s expected arrival had given Fiametta such an amount of fictitious strength, that she had insisted on getting up and being dressed. Some of her old wilfulness had come back to her, and those about her

were only too glad to see that she could rouse herself at all to think of opposing her. So they dressed her in a pretty blue satin dressing-gown, and seated her in her easy-chair by the window.

She had expressed a wish to see Miss Hatchard at once, and the artist was brought straight up into her bedroom.

“ Oh, my dear! my dear! ” cried the little woman, flinging her arms round the girl’s neck and kissing her. “ Oh, if this ain’t the best day of my life! ” and Miss Hatchard stepped back and looked admiringly at the satin gown and the luxurious bedroom, and then kissed and embraced the girl again, as if to make sure that it really was Fiametta who was in the midst of so much splendour.

As for Fiametta herself, a frightened look came into her eyes. A sudden nervous apprehension swept over her that she was to hear the worst news that Miss Hatchard could tell her. In her agony

she tried to put off the evil moment. Her eagerness to see the artist changed to a trembling desire to put off any communication with her.

“Go and rest,” she said nervously; “go away, please go away.”

Miss Hatchard looked a little hurt; but the sudden whiteness that had come over Fiametta alarmed Irene, and she hastily took the artist’s hand and led her from the room.

“She is so weak,” she explained, “that the least agitation upsets her. She has been looking forward to your coming so much, that seeing you has over-excited her.”

“Lor, poor dear!” said Miss Hatchard, sympathisingly. “You must tell me what to do, miss, and I will do it. I don’t want to give no trouble.”

“It is a great pleasure to us to have you here,” said Mrs. Thorold; and Irene went back to Fiametta.

She passed a very troubled night. The dread of what she now felt sure she should hear of David brought back a slight return of the fever. She was not able to distinguish between what had really happened to her and what her fancies brought before her. Wherever she turned, some new form of pain presented itself to her.

When morning came she was more wan and haggard than she had been for weeks, but she was talkative and excited as they had never seen her before.

“Where is Miss Hatchard? Bring me Miss Hatchard!” were her first words to Irene in the morning, when she took the place of one of the night nurses after breakfast.

“She will come to you at once, dear, if you wish it,” said Irene; “but you had better wait and dress first.”

“Yes; I will get up at once. I am better now. I cannot wait any longer.”

She talked in a restless, unconnected way all the time she was being dressed. Irene had never seen her so before, and was alarmed and anxious to put off the interview that seemed to excite her so much ; but Fiametta would not hear of it.

“No ; I must see her at once,” she said. “I cannot wait any longer, and death will end all things ;” and she looked wildly at her cousin.

She was not in a condition to be argued with, so Irene kissed her and left her.

“Lor, my dear,” said Miss Hatchard, after she had come in and kissed her, and taken a seat beside her, “well, you have fallen on your feet, to be sure ! Why, I never see no such house before ! Fit for a queen !” and Miss Hatchard drew her finger in an admiring manner over the velvet-covered arm of the chair.

“Yes, it is very beautiful—too beautiful,” said Fiametta, impatiently. She

wanted to talk of Harcourt Street, not Chaylesford. "Are the Fowlers still in their old rooms?" Now that it came to the point, her heart failed her in asking about David.

"Yes; they have gone into a house of their own. Mrs. Fowler, she have asked often after you;" and Miss Hatchard moved her foot to and fro over the soft carpet, as if to revel in its thickness.

"And Mr. Everest?" asked Fiametta, making a great effort to speak calmly, and looking straight at her friend.

Miss Hatchard turned away her head and coughed.

"Oh, he ain't no good to nobody! He left our house—well, just at the beginning of October. He don't see me, nor I him; nor he don't leave no message for nobody;" and Miss Hatchard glanced sideways at the girl.

She did not blush nor quiver, nor turn away her head, nor give any of the

customary signs of confusion whereby girls testify that their lovers are being spoken of. She was white, very white, but so she had been all day, and her great dark eyes were gazing out through the windows over the frost-bound landscape. Miss Hatchard could not see what their expression was, had she done so their heart-breaking despair might have frightened her. But the girl's quietness deceived the woman who watched her, and she sat there and chatted on, taking her silence as belonging to her weakness, and never dreaming of the thoughts that lay hidden in Fiametta's breast.

All day long Fiametta sat there in her easy-chair, looking out at the snow fields before her. She resisted all efforts to induce her to lie down and rest. She seemed to have no particular desire to say or do anything, only all day long her eyes were fixed on the winding black

line that appeared between the white fields.

She did not see Miss Hatchard again after lunch. They were afraid of tiring her, so Irene sat silent beside her all the afternoon, and wondered what had so suddenly quenched the light of expectation in the wild, beautiful eyes. They were blank and dumb now, as the black river between the snows.

As to what passed in Fiametta's mind that day, it would be hard to say. All the fiery agony through which she had travelled left her, but in its stead remained a hopeless despair and a bitter and intense pain. For the first time she felt really certain that she had committed a crime. A dreadful horror of murder had hung over her, but she had never been able actually to identify herself with the commission of it. The terror of it had bound her fast, but the absolute conviction of it had never clearly come

to her. It came now, as she heard that David had so far loathed her that he would not even ask if she were alive or dead. She believed now that she had murdered her father—believed it as she had only vaguely surmised it before; and as that knowledge came to her, so came to her also the knowledge of how much she loved this man who scorned her—loved him as she had never believed it was possible to love. All the whole strength of her nature, her past life, her very despair and remorse, was bound up in this love of David. Second only to it in magnitude was the scorn with which she regarded herself for loving him. All her bitterest contempt was heaped upon herself. She never blamed him once; she even gloried in his utter desertion of her, for it only raised him still higher in her eyes that he could so hate this thing of weakness and sin that she called herself.

As the still afternoon hours wore by,

and the March sunset dyed the whiteness of the land to the colour of blood, and the crimson flashed over her thin hands lying in her lap, the colour brought back to her mind the stain of the red velvet that she had fancied was upon them after her visit to the prison. She almost fancied it was on them still; and instinctively she put her hand to her bosom, as if to feel for the little dagger that had lain there.

Then for the first time she wondered what had become of it, how it was that no inquiry had been made as to its introduction into the prison. Was it possible that David, when he had gone away with the policeman that morning on which the news came, had found it and hidden it for her sake? She could think of no other way that would account for no inquiries having been made of her; and to feel that her life was in the hands of the man she loved, that, in fact, it was owing to his merciful toleration that she

existed, added a sting of bitterness so intense to her already great pain that it drove her to the very verge of distraction.

Perhaps the very strength of her passion and pain kept back her old bewilderment of brain from her. Had it come, it would have been in mercy.

If only she had that little velvet-sheathed dagger, how easy it would be ! A little scratch would do it ; one little gash above her heart, and she would be at rest for ever. She longed for it with a bitter intensity that could not be put into words, as she sat looking out at the shades of night stealing over the landscape. It was so easy, so simple—a scratch, and all her troubles would be over. There was nothing beyond the tomb for Fiametta. She had no belief in any future ; death to her was the end of all things, and that end was peace. She watched the last ray of sunlight die out of the sky—it flickered a little, and

then went out; and the silent river stole on, black as ink between the snowy fields.

She felt strangely calm and quiet—the very extremity of her distress kept her still; and there was a sudden feeling of vigour through her limbs, that came of the force of her passions, and felt to her like a new life running through her veins.

“Irene,” she said in a low voice—
“Irene, I should like to be alone for a little while.”

“You are sure you will not want anything, darling? I will put this bell on the table beside you. Shall I call nurse to sit in the dressing-room?”

“No, thank you. Kiss me once before you go, Irene.”

Irene, wondering at the request, embraced her tenderly. There was something in the girl’s constrained still air that half-awed, half-frightened her cousin.

“I don’t think I ought to leave you,” she said; “you are so weak.”

“No; I am quite strong,” answered Fiametta, with something of her old stubborn air. “I want a little rest. Please go.” And Irene went.

The moment she was gone downstairs, Fiametta rose, and, wrapping a white cashmere shawl about her, went swiftly to the door. Here she paused a moment and listened. There was nobody on the staircase or in the hall. Like a ghost she passed down the wide stairs and out through the conservatory at the end of the hall, without making a sound. She did not know her way about the house, but unfortunately she had taken the easiest way to get out without attracting attention. A little door that opened easily led from the conservatory out into the garden. The windows of the lower rooms were all shuttered and curtained by this time. Within a few feet of her,

as she stood in the snowy garden, Mr. and Mrs. Thorold, and their daughter and guest, were seated in the warm, bright drawing-room, whither Irene had gone to tell of Fiametta's strange request.

Fiametta stood outside in the gathering darkness. There was no wind, everything was still and silent around her. Beyond the flower garden in which she stood was a slope of lawn and the fields she has seen from her window, and there, lying like a rift between the clouds, was the black and silent river.

She had been a little bewildered as she came out into the keen, cold air, but the sight of the river revived her. She pushed back the little tendrils of hair that fell over her brow with both hands with her old impatient gesture, and then, wrapping her shawl about her shoulders, started off in a straight line down the frozen lawn for the river.

She was very wavering and unsteady

in her movements. Her weakness was very great, and nothing but the passion in her kept her from sinking over and over again in the damp, soft snow, and remaining there. A sudden rush of wild despair came over her as she made her first stumble in the snow. A terror rose up in her that she should not even be able to accomplish this last object of her life. The sense of David's scorn stung her on to frenzy. She would take the life he held in such contempt that he would not even suffer the law to take its course upon her. She would not keep what he esteemed so worthless. So, blinded with her rage and love and remorse, the poor thing stumbled on, getting every moment nearer and nearer to the place for her destruction. She reached it at last, panting, toiling, wet through with the snow into which she had fallen, her shawl lost, her loose dressing-gown sodden and limp, her head

burning, her eyes flaming, her mouth parched, and her poor brain in a whirl of terrible imaginings.

To herself she seemed a lost and forsaken creature, a pollution to the earth she inhabited, a disgrace to the man she loved, the murderer of the man who gave her life. To her distorted vision the very snow seemed of the hue of blood, and she shrieked aloud as the pale moon came out from behind a cloud and let her see her trembling hands.

"They are red!" she cried; "red as that red velvet; not even the river will wash them clean. Oh! what shall I do? what shall I do, if the river will not take the stain away?" and flinging up her arms, she gathered all her strength together for one mad rush into the icy water.

"Have some hot water, then," said a voice behind her; and a strong arm caught her round the waist.

She knew the voice, though the speaker had not recognised her agonised cry. With the strength of despair she dashed his arm away from her, only to feel herself held tightly by both shoulders.

“Fiametta!” he cried, in a voice almost as wild as hers, and, in his sudden surprise and terror, loosening his hold.

She threw up her arms and flung herself forward; but he caught her just in time, and held her so firmly to his breast that her struggles to free herself were of no avail. She turned her wild face up to his in an agony of supplication.

“Let me go; I murdered him!” she said.

His only answer was a great sob, a rush of tears, and to press down kisses upon her face, her hair, even her sodden garments. He was nearly as beside himself as the girl, at finding her in this condition. He did not know if it were madness or trouble that had driven her

down among the snows to drown herself. He saw how white and wasted she was, her cropped hair, her insufficient apparel, the strange, wild light in her eyes. Love for her absorbed every other feeling in him ; he could not even speak, the state she was in was so piteous.

She had shivered all over as he caught her to his breast ; all her mad strength suddenly forsook her ; she would have sunk down in the snows had he not held her so tightly ; but with the fierce delight of his kisses a sudden clearness lit up her mind. She remembered, as if by a flash of revelation, all that had taken place in the prison that day—all that had happened stood out clearly before her.

“ Did I do it ? ” she cried.

“ No, no, my darling ; no, a thousand times no. He died, dear, of starvation. It was not *that* ; I have it here ; ” and he touched the front of his coat.

She turned her face up to him with a

solemn light in her great eyes, while a beautiful smile and a look of infinite peace came over her wan face. She did not speak, only looked up once at him, and then sank her head down upon his breast.





CHAPTER XII.

As the girl's fainting head fell upon his shoulder, David lifted her in his arms, and looked hastily around to see if any house was near at hand. The lights of Chaylesford House among the trees caught his glance at once, and, wrapping her floating draperies about her, David bore her in his arms towards them.

As he approached the house a door opened, and a man came running out into the night air—a clergyman; he had no hat on, and his face betokened the greatest anxiety and distress. The moment he caught sight of David, he came towards him.

“Where did you find her?” he cried. “The poor child! Bring her in quickly. Monica”—this to a fair-haired lady in evening dress, who came out upon the steps at the sound of his voice—“thank God, we have found her!”

“Come in, come in,” she answered; “bring her in to the fire. Poor darling! how could she have got out?”

Scarcely noticing who spoke to him, or what was said, but all intent upon getting the half-frozen girl into some place of warmth and light, David bearing her came into the large bright hall.

“A fire!” he gasped; “let me take her to a fire.”

“Into her own room will be best, and we can put her to bed at once,” said Mrs. Thorold, leading the way. Her husband offered to help to carry Fiametta, but David, only clasping her the tighter, staggered up the stairs under his burden. He had come so hastily through the

snow that he was out of breath and well nigh exhausted.

“Lay her on the sofa close to the fire,” said Mrs. Thorold, in her soft, pitying voice. “Poor darling! she must have these wet things off first.”

“Let me help you to restore her,” said David, hoarsely, as he saw his charge taken possession of by Mrs. Thorold and an old nurse, who had been in the room when they entered. He could not bear to give her up even to this sweet woman, who seemed to have such a tender regard for her.

She looked up in his face.

“Where did you find her?” she asked; then, without waiting for an answer, she took his hand and led him from the room. Outside the door they found Mr. Thorold.

“Will you go down together?” she said. “I will let you know as soon as she recovers.”

There was nothing to be done but to

obey her, for her manner admitted of no contradiction ; moreover, even in his anxiety, a dawning conviction came over David that Fiametta's bedroom was not the place for him to stay in, so he followed Mr. Thorold downstairs, and, while doing so rapidly, made up his mind as to how he could best hide the dreadful story of that night from all men.

There was a sound of singing from one of the rooms on the left-hand side of the hall ; but David stopped Mr. Thorold as he was going towards it.

“ Let me speak to you alone ; ” he said, and Mr. Thorold turned aside and went into his study, on the other side of the hall.

He closed the door after him, and looked inquiringly at David.

“ You have rendered us a great service,” he said, “ though I am at a loss to account for the occasion for it. Miss Thorold is my cousin, and has been in

very ill health for a long time, and how she left this house is a mystery to us all."

"Your cousin!" said David, a light beginning to break in upon him.

"My cousin. My name is Thorold; I am the vicar of this parish. Where did you find the poor child?"

David, who had been sitting, rose, and walked to the fire, and looked thoughtfully down into its depths. He was in somewhat of a dilemma. If he said that he knew Fiametta, it was more than probable that her relations would suspect her of having stolen out to meet him. He would not speak of her attempted suicide—that, at least, should never pass his lips to any living soul; no one should know from him that she had that stain upon her.

"I am a stranger in this neighbourhood," he said, speaking very slowly, "and in coming across the fields from Penshurst, I saw a lady in a dressing-

gown, standing in the snow. She seemed to me to be under the influence of some delusion or in delirium." Here he stopped, undecided what to say next.

"The poor child!" sighed Mr. Thorold, "she has had a very severe attack of brain fever; but we had hoped that her mind, though still weak, was out of the region of delirium. This evening she expressed a wish to be left alone, and it was granted her; and she must, in her bewildered state, have taken advantage of it, and wandered out. Poor child! poor child! It was a great mercy that you found her. She might have come to some terrible end. We had only just missed her, my wife having gone upstairs to see her."

"Then does anybody else know of her disappearance?" asked David.

"No one, except my wife's old nurse, whom you saw in the room, and she is trustworthy."

"It had better be kept a secret," said

David, moodily, again looking into the red depths of the fire.

“I quite agree with you,” said Mr. Thorold. “If you will excuse me for a moment, I will mention this to my wife and the nurse, and it need not go any further.”

While he was gone, David sat staring at the fire. Now that the excitement was over, he felt sick and cold with horror. The dreadful tones of her voice, as she was about to throw herself in the river, rang in his ears. The feeling that had he been a moment later the black waters would have closed over her for ever made him turn faint with pain. When Mr. Thorold came back, he found him leaning his head against the mantelpiece, his face almost as white as the marble on which it rested.

In a few minutes some brandy was held to his lips. He drank it, and sat up, and began to collect his thoughts.

“I reproach myself very much for not having offered you some before,” said Mr. Thorold; “but, I confess, I was thinking only of my cousin. I see you are damp with the snow. May I offer you some dry clothes? Pray come into my dressing-room.”

“Thank you, no; the fire will do quite as well,” answered David; and he drew closer to it.

At that moment the drawing-room door opened, and some ladies’ voices were heard in the hall. David started, and then listened intently; for one of the voices belonged to Miss Hatchard. Knowing that she was in the house, decided him in his course of action.

“This has been an unpleasant affair,” he said to Mr. Thorold, and speaking in as cool a voice and manner as he possibly could. “Probably Miss Thorold will not wish to have it talked about. No one shall ever hear a word of it from me.

Perhaps it would be well even to conceal my presence from other people in the house. To-morrow, if you will allow me, I will call here on you and inquire how she is."

"I am extremely obliged to you for your kindness and delicacy," said Mr. Thorold. "Whom have I the pleasure of thanking for his great service to us?"

"My name is David Everest, and I am a Civil Servant. May I ask you to keep this as secret as I shall the events of this evening? My name is of very little consequence to anybody."

Mr. Thorold bowed.

"It will always be remembered by me as belonging to one who has done me a great service," he said, in his old-fashioned way; and he took David's hand, as the latter rose to depart.

"Before going," said David, "might I ask if there is any improvement in Miss Thorold's state?"

Mr. Thorold went upstairs to inquire, and returned with the news that she had recovered from her faint, but was very weak and agitated; and David had to be satisfied with this. He resisted the offer of a bed, which was pressed upon him by Mr. Thorold, and went out into the clear star-light night.

Had not Mr. Thorold himself seen him into the road leading to Penshurst, he would never have reached his inn that night, for he was too much excited to know or care very much where he was going. The wild joy of finding her was coupled with intense pain at the state in which her mind was. Her silence with regard to him was all explained now, and one great load at least was lifted off his heart. She had not forsaken him so much as she had been afraid of him. Poor, tortured child! what she must have suffered with this load of guilt upon her!

He could not get any sleep at all that

night, and early in the morning he was over at Chaylesford again. He was shown into Mr. Thorold's study, and heard from him that Fiametta had had a very bad night, but was better this morning, and apparently quite sensible, though still very weak, so weak that not even a strong light could be allowed in her room.

"And," added Mr. Thorold, gravely, "the doctor has admitted to me that he has strong doubts of her strength to get over the shock to her system produced by the cold last night."

Mr. Thorold's surprise at seeing David's face as he uttered these words was expressed by his putting his hand on the other's shoulders.

"You know Miss Thorold?" he said, seeing at once how matters stood.

"I love her with all my heart and soul," said David, looking the elder man in the eyes; then he broke down, and

hid his face on his arms resting on the back of his chair.

Mr. Thorold paused.

“ You knew her in London ? ” he asked.

Then, encouraged by his voice and manner, David told him the whole story of his love, omitting only the incident of the poisoned dagger and all concerned in it. Mr. Thorold listened with deep attention, and remained some moments thinking earnestly before he answered.

“ You will agree with me, that Miss Thorold, not having communicated with you since she has been here, nor, to the best of my belief, alluded to you in any way, it will be taking an advantage of her in her present weak state, if I should, as you request, allow you to see her.”

David was silent. He could not tell her cousin of the dark shadow that had hung over the poor girl's mind, and that had led her to believe that she had forfeited

his friendship; but it was hard to be kept away from her by the shadow of a shadow.

“Yes,” he said at last, “it would be taking an advantage of her.”

“Quite so. But, on the other hand, you shall be kept informed of the state of her health. I pledge myself to do that;” and with this David was obliged to be content.

He went back to London the next day, and in a week’s time Miss Hatchard followed him. The accounts of Fiametta sent by Mr. Thorold had been on the whole hopeful; but David could not resist going up into Miss Hatchard’s studio directly he came in from his work to get, if possible, the latest details.

Miss Hatchard was busy about her painting, and David took a seat and gravely contemplated her work, which was a design of fat cupids among arabesques. He knew that the less hurry

he appeared to be in, the more chance he had of getting the truth from the artist.

“Pretty thing,” he observed contemplatively. “Foundling hospital on bath night. Infants hung up to dry. Touching scene!”

“Get out!” said Miss Hatchard. “It’s a design for window curtains.”

“For a descendant of King Herod’s, I presume. Well, how did you leave Fiametta?” he inquired, flinging his leg negligently over the arm of the chair.

Miss Hatchard stopped, brush in hand, and stared at him.

“Ah!” she retorted, after a pause, “you think you can get it out of me where she is, but you can’t.”

“I hear she has not been well,” he went on, in a lazy voice, leaning his head back, as if the effort of speaking exhausted him. “Let me see, it was yesterday, I think, that the doctor pronounced her

out of danger. She has had a relapse of some sort lately. They are a nice sort of people, those Thorolds; don't you think so?"

Miss Hatchard dropped her brush, and stared at him, her mouth and eyes wide open with astonishment. David picked up and handed her the brush.

"Don't let me interrupt your work," he said sweetly; "that interesting foundling wants a nose."

Miss Hatchard darted a look of indignation at him.

"The Thorolds, indeed! a lot you know about the Thorolds!"

"I generally hear from the Rev. James of that name once a day, not oftener, as a rule."

"I don't believe a word you are sayin'," retorted Miss Hatchard, putting a fierce dab, intended to represent an eye, into the middle of one of her cherubs' cheeks, "not a word on it."

David pulled a letter out of his pocket and showed her the address and signature.

“The game is up, Miss Hatchard. I am afraid you will have an awful bone to pick with her, for keeping me away from her so long. It looks like having a design of your own upon me, and one woman never forgives another woman for that. I am very sorry to disoblige a lady, but I really can’t.”

“Oh Lor!” cried the artist, flinging her palette and brushes on the table, and dropping on a chair—“Oh Lor! I believe you do know all about her, after all.”

“Yes, I do,” he said gravely, taking a seat beside her. “Why do you object to my doing so, Miss Hatchard?”

Miss Hatchard’s only reply at first was to wring her hands wildly, and then to burst into a flood of tears.

“You have been very cruel to us!” he said.

“Oh Lor! oh Lor!” sobbed the little

woman. "I did it with the best of intentions. 'Twas all for her sake. I didn't think you was good enough for her. I thought you was like—oh, dear, dear—like your par was. There, I couldn't abide to see you so much as look at her, a thinking of him and my poor dear!" And Miss Hatchard sobbed wildly.

David got up and began to walk about the room.

"Don't tell me anything about my father, please," he said at last, stopping before her. "He is dead. Let his memory be in peace, if not sacred. You never knew how much depended on my seeing Fiametta, and that shall be your excuse, for I believe you meant well by her."

"I did, I did. I own to it I never thought of you; it was all for her. Oh Lor, Mr. Everest! I 'aven't 'armed her by it, 'ave I? She hasn't been miser-

able in that there beautifullest place all along of me, has she?" and Miss Hatchard seized his hand and looked imploringly into his face.

"I hope not," he said gently; "but you must go on as you began now, Miss Hatchard, and must not say a word about me in your letters."

She looked at him in a puzzled manner.

"Then you ain't engaged to be married?" she asked.

David dropped her hand and turned away from her.

"I will never forgive you if you as much as mention my name to her," he said, preparing to leave the room. "Everything is in her own hands now." And then he left.





CHAPTER XIII.

AND how came David to be wandering about the fields outside Chaylesford on that cold night in March? Little Mrs. Fowler, lying on her bed with a tiny infant beside her that had made its appearance some considerable time before it was expected, was the real cause of his going there.

Nellie had been ill, very ill indeed, so ill that at first all Mr. Fowler's care for his daughter was subdued by his intense anxiety for his wife. As she recovered, he was made to pay the penalty for his inattention, by a very strict course of baby-worship. Nellie was perfectly con-

vinced that the weakly little creature was the loveliest, most precocious baby in the world. She was so happy over it, that if Frederick had been inclined to jealousy he would have had a very trying time after the advent of the wonderful infant.

Miss Hatchard went to see Nellie before going to Chaylesford. She looked so wan and ill that she alarmed that kind-hearted soul, and by way of cheering her a little she told her where she was going. She did not mention Fiametta's name, but talked of some commissions that a gentleman had given her in the autumn; and then when Nellie asked where Fiametta was, she changed colour and answered evasively.

Nellie could scarcely control her excitement during the remainder of her visitor's stay. She felt certain from Miss Hatchard's manner that she was going to see Fiametta, and she instantly resolved to let David know it at once.

Miss Hatchard was to start that afternoon, and Nellie worried herself nearly into a fever with plans to get word to David that night.

She had no one whom she could send ; for the nurse would not leave her, and the little maid-of-all-work was too stupid to send on a message so far away. Her husband would not be home until late, as he had some business to attend to after Museum hours ; for now that he had a wife and family, Mr. Fowler was obliged to supplement his income by doing any extra work that he could get.

A letter seemed to be the quickest way of letting David know, and, propped up by her pillows, Nellie wrote to him.

“ DEAR MR. EVEREST,

“ Miss Hatchard has been here this morning, and she tells me she is going to a place in Kent, near Penshurst station, but she would not give me the

exact name of the place itself. She says she is going to paint portraits, and that the gentleman gave her the order last autumn, which was when that strange clergyman came to see Fiametta. I feel sure from her manner that she is going to see her now. I can't tell you how I feel it, but I do feel quite certain of it.

"I can't write any more. Baby is so well, and getting quite big and strong. I mean her to go downstairs to-morrow. She sends her love to her future god-father.

"Yours very sincerely,

"NELLIE FOWLER."

David received this letter the next morning when he came down to breakfast, Sarah Ann having forgotten to bring it up the night before. His state of mind on receiving it can easily be imagined. His untasted breakfast was left upon the table, and he was off to

Gospel Oak to collect further information without delay. But Nellie had nothing more to tell him. Miss Hatchard had been discreet enough to suit her purpose. All he could do was to follow up the clue given by Nellie, and trust to coming upon some traces of the girl he sought.

So he had gone down to Penshurst that morning, and had spent the day in wandering about the neighbourhood and making such guarded inquiries as he could. But Chaylesford was some miles from Penshurst station, and but for his chance encounter with Fiametta when he was wandering hopelessly about in sheer inability to sit still, he might have remained for weeks there without hearing of her.

Nellie, lying on her bed, thought of him a good deal. She was very tender-hearted at all times, but since the birth of the wonderful baby she had become even more so. She cried softly to herself

many times as she pictured him in his distress seeking for the least trace of the girl he loved, and perhaps failing in his search. A few days later, when the grim March snows had melted a little and feeble spring weather had begun, she had an unexpected visitor.

Miss Markham had never forgiven Nellie for the step she had taken in marrying Mr. Fowler,—at least she declared she never had, being aided and abetted in her firmness by Miss Philippina Jiggers. In her heart of hearts—which remote spot was seldom reached, for it was so thickly overlaid with fads and fancies—Miss Markham longed to forgive Nellie. Miss Jiggers and Mr. Tom Marlow, however, would not allow her to do so, and with them the weak, vain woman was as clay in the hands of the potter.

But when the spring came, and Mr. Tom Marlow went to Switzerland to

climb mountains before the snow had melted to show what an all-round genius he was, and Miss Jiggers, with a party of select female spirits, of the higher and emancipated order, donned the "divided" skirt, and set off on a tramp through the northern counties of England, Miss Markham was left pretty much to herself. Tom did not want to take her to Switzerland, and she was not strong enough to carry a knapsack and walk fifteen miles a day, so she went to Brighton, and subscribed to a lending library, and there being nobody there to see her, read novels, and went to sleep in the afternoons.

But she read the newspapers, too, especially the ladies' column, so of course in due time she saw the announcement of the birth of Nellie's baby, and the news promptly sent her into a state of the wildest excitement and alarm.

"The idea of Helen's having a baby!"

she cried, as she laid the paper down. "Why, she is only a baby herself, poor dear thing! and how she will know what to do with it, is more than I can tell. She will give it horrible things to eat, I am sure—macaroons, perhaps; she was always fond of them." Miss Markham had lately attended some lectures on food, and was great on the subject accordingly. "Now, I have no doubt in the world she will never think of giving it lentils; and what an interesting thing a child brought up entirely on lentils would be—all brain and muscle! Dear, dear, and I am sure Helen will never think of it."

And Miss Markham gazed out of the window sorrowfully, and contemplated the immense loss to science Nellie's carelessness would bring about.

"Then there is its education," pursued Miss Markham, reflectively. "Now, how can Helen superintend that properly?"

She knows nothing, absolutely nothing, of any system. She will let it learn just what it likes, perhaps not learn at all. It is absolutely imperative that somebody should look after that poor child, or she will be sacrificed by her mother's foolishness and disobedience; and I dare say it is a pretty child, too. Helen was a lovely baby! I really think, I really do think, and I believe Philippina will agree with me, that it is my imperative duty to rescue that poor infant from its mother's foolishness. Dear me, fancy Helen with a baby, and a girl, too! Dear little thing! I wonder if they would let it be called after me?" And in a tremendous bustle and fuss Miss Markham settled to go up to town the next day and see Nellie.

Nellie's astonishment on seeing her aunt enter her little bedroom may be imagined, and it was not decreased by that good lady's darting forward, talking

violently all the time, and taking the baby out of her arms.

“My dear Helen, so glad to see you and the precious child, and two weeks old already; and I do trust, oh Helen! I do trust you have not been giving it macaroons, or letting it have sweets. You were always so fond of them, you know. And, my dear child, this long robe. You should have seen—only you never would go to lectures—the pattern I saw at the ‘Scientific Clothing’ lecture the other day—a sort of full trousers drawn in *below* the feet; prevents draughts and weight, you understand. Now, my dear, tell me at once, have you tried lentils? But I am sure you have not.”

“Lentils! Oh, aunt, why she is only two weeks old!”

“I knew it,” said Miss Markham, in a resigned tone; “I knew it. You have no soul for science, Helen—never had.”

“No; I know that,” said Nellie, taking

the child again, and kissing Miss Markham's cheek! "But, dear aunt, I am so very glad to see you! Frederick will be so delighted!"

"Well, I must acknowledge," said Miss Markham, "that I did not come to see Mr. Fowler so much as the baby. It's the most delightful thing its being a girl. Give it to me again, Helen. It must learn to like its great aunt."

"I am so glad you have come!" said Helen, gratefully. "Oh, dear aunt, I have missed you so. Your forgiveness was the only thing we wanted to make us quite happy."

"Well," said Miss Markham, looking round the small room, "I shouldn't think a little more money would do any harm. And Lucilla—— You must let her be called Lucilla, Helen!"

"We had settled to call her after you already!" cried Nellie, delighted beyond measure at her aunt's interest in the

child. "And isn't she lovely, aunt? Just look at her eyes—there, she is opening them; and do you see the clever little way in which she doubles up her fists. I think it is so wonderful, and only a fortnight old!"

"Well, do you know," cried Miss Markham, after an earnest contemplation of the small mottled face on her lap—"do you know, Helen, I really consider she is remarkably like me!"

An exclamation of indignant denial was rising to the mother's lips, for Miss Markham was emphatically not beautiful, but she repressed it, thereby showing a most commendable example to all young mothers.

"She has eyes of the colour of yours," she said; and she kissed the child, as if to make up to it for the slight given to its personal appearance.

"Yes; deep blue," said Miss Markham, in a satisfied tone. "I would not hurt

your feelings for the world, Helen, dear, but your poor mother, though a very pretty woman, was never considered to possess quite such an intellectual style of features as mine. I am so glad the dear child takes after me ; and, as I was about to say, Helen, Lucilla must be brought up with every possible advantage. I don't consider these small rooms are sufficiently airy. You must move into a larger house, my dear."

"Oh, but, aunt, Frederick's income is——"

"I know, my dear," interposed her aunt, "Frederick's income no doubt would bear improving, and, Helen, it must be improved, for the sake of this precious infant. I shall take a house for you myself somewhere in a good healthy place, and I will have all the drains pulled up and overhauled first. I heard a lecture about drains the other day that positively made my flesh creep. I won't

have any money spared over the dear child. Thank goodness, I have plenty for us all; and, my dear, I shall make her my heir. Now don't say a word, and really, Helen, if you begin to cry you will wake her. Really, I never saw anything so pretty as she looks now!"

"Oh, dear aunt, you are good!" cried Nellie, embracing her warmly. "But oh, dear aunt, you won't wish her to go to quite so many lectures as I did, will you?"

Miss Markham looked round the room. There was no one there but themselves, but she spoke nevertheless in a lower voice.

"To tell you the truth, my dear," she said, "since I have been in Brighton I have been feeling wonderfully better than I did in London, and I have no doubt in the world that that has something to do with not going into so many crowded rooms. The very last lecture I heard

was on the dreadful effects of breathing too much carbonic acid gas, and the place was full of it at the very time, as the lecturer stated. Now, we can't have this precious child exposed to poisonous gases. If they give lectures in the open air, she may go to them; but she must not go into crowded rooms. What between gases and drains and infectious diseases, I declare I am almost afraid for her to live in London. Perhaps Mr. Fowler would not mind the country, if we can find a convenient place for him. But the first thing to be considered, Helen, is this precious child. Really, Helen, your having a girl instead of a boy is the only clever thing you ever did in your life."

Nellie being of opinion that the wonderful baby could not be improved upon, and being highly delighted at her aunt's visit and munificent intentions towards the child, they passed a very happy

afternoon. When Frederick came back, they considerably astonished him by both trying to tell him at once the conclusions at which they had arrived concerning the future of his daughter. Miss Markham snubbed him a little at first, of course, Mr. Fowler's appearance and manners always seeming to invite that course of treatment; but she rapidly thawed, and they became most excellent friends on her discovering that Mr. Fowler's joy at the sex of the infant was even greater than his wife's, and everything promised to go very well indeed for the Fowlers.

"I only wish," said Mr. Fowler, as he went to bed that night, "that we knew how David has got on."





CHAPTER XIV.

For some days it was very doubtful whether the life that David had rescued from among the snows would remain upon this earth, but when consciousness returned hope returned also, for from the moment that Fiametta regained her senses she began little by little to mend in health. Her attitude now as an invalid was altogether changed. Formerly she was indifferent whether she lived or died; now she was the most docile and persevering patient, obeying her nurse's instructions in every detail. The love of life seemed so strong within her, that it seemed impossible she could die now.

She was so determined to get well, that in point of fact she did get wonderfully better in a very short space of time.

The change in her was so sudden and so complete, that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Thorold could have the least doubt by whose influence it had been brought about. Neither of the girls knew of David's appearance on the scene, for, rather to the surprise of her cousin, Fiametta never mentioned him.

Day by day as she grew stronger, so also she grew more beautiful. Her great eyes, that had been as sullen caverns under her straight brows, were filled with light; the lines of her beautiful mouth relaxed; her thin cheeks rounded to their perfect delicate outline; her figure became fuller and more graceful. She was so lovely that Irene and Cecily, pretty girls though they were, looked commonplace beside her; and with all their generous hearts they loved and admired

her beauty and her sweet, imperious ways. Her voice had lost its hardness, and was full and soft, as became the voice from such a full, round throat. She would always be somewhat quick and exacting—it was in her nature to be so ; but she was never exacting for herself, only for others.

As soon as she was able to be moved, her cousins took her to Dover, that she might be strengthened by the fresh sea breezes. She had never seen the sea before, and it was a new era in her existence when she first watched the waves upon the shore.

“ If only they could have it in London ! ” she sighed to Irene, as she felt the salt breezes on her cheek.

London ! She was always thinking of London, Irene discovered ; for now, as she grew well enough to talk and read, she was for ever alluding to it. Every luxury and comfort that surrounded her

served but to point out to her with greater and greater distinctness the wretchedness and poverty of the courts and lanes of the great city that she was so familiar with.

“I must go back to London,” she said to Mr. Thorold one day. “As soon as I am strong and well, I must go back and help those who never know what happiness is. I will take the money you give me in your goodness and spend it for them.”

The hard and cruel part of her Socialism had fallen away from her, only the good remained. She no longer reviled the rich, but she, if possible, loved the poor still more.

“You will end in becoming a Christian,” he said to her with a smile, thinking that her going to London might very easily be managed if she choose; but he wished to let her be the first to speak of David. “You will be obliged to be one,

because the most perfect Teacher of all that you hold most dear was Jesus Christ."

"I thought before I came to you," she said, "that Christianity made people selfish and exclusive."

"The greatest sceptical writer in the world," he said gravely, "declares that Christ was the first to discover that all men are brothers."

She smiled thoughtfully, and looked out of the open window, beside which she was lying, upon the stretch of blue sea towards the distant French cliffs. The wind stirred her red golden curls, and a little faint blush came into her cheeks as she said—

"Did Mr. Everest tell you where he had found me when he brought me in?"

Mr. Thorold started; he had not expected her to ask him that question.

"Out in the fields in the snow," he replied.

“Nothing else?”

“Nothing else.”

She paused a moment, and a deeper glow came over her face.

“I was going to drown myself,” she said, in a low voice. “I thought I had murdered my father.”

“My dear child.”

“Yes; I thought I had killed him. I meant to do it,” she added, lifting her eyes to his for an instant, and then lowering them again; “but he, Mr. Everest, saved me from it. I owe my life to him, and, better than my life, my father’s life.”

There was a long pause. Mr. Thorold put his hand on hers.

“My poor child,” he said.

She raised his hand to her lips. There were tears in her eyes as she looked at him.

“You were not in your right mind,” he said, in answer to the look in her eyes.

“It is like your goodness to find that excuse for me,” she answered. “I do not know; it is only lately, quite lately, that I have been able to really recollect about it. When Mr. Everest told me that I was innocent, I had a flash of recollection about it; but it went away, and only a sense of a great weight having been lifted off me remained. But since I have been here by the sea, I can remember it all. I do not say it in excuse for myself, but, I believe, for years I did not really know what I was doing. I lived in a dream of my own. But part of my dream I must carry out. You will not think it ungrateful of me, but I must go back to my own people.”

He did not quite understand her.

“Your own people?” he repeated.

“To the poor and ignorant and suffering,” she replied. “I, myself, have much to learn; but I know I can help them a little.”

He wondered that she did not speak to him again of David. He felt sure that she loved him; but perhaps it was on this account that she said nothing.

“Would you not like to see Mr. Everest?” he said. “He told me you had been great friends.”

A swift crimson dyed her face and neck.

“Why does he not come again?” she said, looking down.

“He is waiting for you to send for him.”

She made no answer; but that night she sent a letter containing only these words, with the date and address:

“I am at Dover; if you wish to renew our old friendship, come.”

She had been waiting every day for him, and this hope of meeting him had helped forward her recovery. Until this conversation with Mr. Thorold, she had never dreamt that his coming depended

on her. She was so sure of their love for each other that she never doubted him, though the waiting was at times a sore trial to her. She had no conception of the sickness of hope deferred that it was to him. With the ardour of her passionate nature, she had, in the instant in which he clasped her to his breast among the snowy fields, divined and accepted his love. She needed no renewal of that first declaration, and in her perfect faith in him she never dreamt that he was not as certain of her love for him.

In truth, these three months of waiting had been terribly hard to David ; and the better she grew, the harder her silence had been to him. If she was well enough to go to Dover, she was well enough to send for him. Was he mistaken, and did that passionate look into his eyes on that evening only mean that she was relieved from the dread of crime that had pressed her down ? Had her mind been incapable

of understanding that he loved her? She had given him no sign of love save that one look, but she had received his kisses. Poor David was alternately on the pinnacle of hope and in the depths of despair, but he worked among the poor all the same, perhaps harder than before.

Some little success seemed crowning his labours. He had not formed a trades-union, and was never likely to do so; but he had helped many and many a poor woman towards a better life in this world, and probably in the next. It need not be said with what joy Fiametta's letter filled him; the afternoon express to Dover was not half fast enough for him on that June day when he received it.

He got out at the Harbour station. It was nearly seven o'clock, and the evening sun was shining full and warm upon the castle cliffs, and lighting up the bare brown downs with a yellow glow. The blue smoke of the town made a girdle of

vapour about the base of the purple heights on the western side.

The tide was full in the harbour, and it lay as calm and quiet as a bit of sky. Scarcely a line of white told where, further on, the sea stirred the pebbles upon the beach. The brown sails of the fishing-boats and the white wings of the yachts lay motionless. Far away on the other side of the sea he saw the sunny land of France, pink and dove-coloured as the light shone upon its cliffs.

David had never been in Dover before. Every step of the way was new to him; but by one of those curious freaks of mind that occur after a long strain or great excitement, he felt as if he was familiar with every detail of the place, and that in some former period of existence he had paced these wharves and piers, and lived through the welcome that he was hastening to meet.

There was no difficulty about finding

the house ; it was one of those green-shuttered, balconied residences that stand facing the sea towards the middle of the parade. Through many of the open windows as he passed along he saw people seated at dinner ; a few loiterers were outside, but not many. The sight of so many dinner-tables made him turn aside and throw himself upon the pebbles of the beach. He would not risk the chance of being told by the servant that Fiametta was at dinner ; he would wait for an hour before going there.

So he sat on the beach and smoked, and looked at the deepening blue of the sea and the fading French cliffs, noted how a little breeze rose up and made the boats dip and dance and slowly sail away, saw the purple shadows steal over the town from the western heights and gradually climb up the castle sides. In great happiness, as in great pain, the mind seeks relief by dwelling on little details

unconnected with its passion. David saw more of nature in the sea and sky and cliffs in that hour of silent anticipation than he had ever noticed in his life before.

More people came out on to the parade ; lights began to spring up along it. The castle turned to orange and blood colour. Then in the gloaming he crossed the clattering pebbles, and went straight to Fiametta's door. A sound of music came from the open balcony windows. He caught a glimpse of light dresses, and heard the laughter of girls' voices. They startled him a little ; he had been so absorbed in thought of Fiametta, that he had forgotten the existence of other people. The music, the sighing of the sea, the strange place, and that stranger sensation of being impelled to do what he had once done before ages ago,—all confused him. He stood in the drawing-room doorway as the servant announced

him, his blue eyes wide and dazed, his face ashy with excitement. He trembled, big, strong man as he was, for a sudden fear had swept over him that Fiametta was not there.

The room was a large, low one, a shaded lamp stood near the piano, the windows were open towards the sea. There were several ladies present. He had a confused idea of white curtains floating in the wind, and light dresses and bright ribbons, also of a sudden hush that fell upon everything when he appeared.

Then he saw her rising up from her couch beside the window, the purple sea behind her flashing golden head, her long, soft, white dress clinging about her, her face pale, her eyes like stars in the night, her white hands held out towards him, as she rose and came to him.

He did not take her hands, did not advance a step to meet her. She looked to him as an angel out of heaven, in her

wonderful beauty and grace. He suddenly felt himself to be poor and mean and despicable, fit only to kiss the hem of her garment.

So with flushed face and dazed eyes he looked at her coming towards him ; and she, finding he did not advance to meet her, made a little pause as if in momentary hesitation. But her great love raised her far above such pitiful little observances of decorum ; with a quicker step she came on, and then without a word she put her hands upon his shoulders, and kissed him full on his lips.

Doubt and mistrust could have no place with her, so without a trace of woman's pretty coquetry she gave him her troth, and measured his faithfulness by her own.

That kiss loosened David from the spell that was over him. How long he held her he did not know, but when he loosened her they were alone.

“ You look at me as if you were wor-

shipping me," she said to him, when they were seated side by side in the window.

"So I do," he said. "Regina Coeli;" and he put a piece of her dress to his lips.

"Yet," she said timidly, "I have been very wicked."

"No," he said; "terribly led astray, but not wicked. You never wished to do anything wrong."

"I thought," she faltered, "that death was better than dishonour."

"So it is; better than some sorts of dishonour. Darling, you were ignorant, not wicked."

"I am so ignorant," she said; "there are so many things I ought to know. But I have learned much since I have been with these good, kind people, and one of these things is the difference between Christianity, as they hold it, and Socialism."

"What is that?" said David. "Some

people say they are the same, though I never believed them."

"They are *not* the same!" cried Fiametta; "they are not the same, for the Christian's maxim is, 'All that is mine is yours,' and the Socialist's is only, 'All that is yours is mine.' If there were more Christians, there would be fewer Socialists, perhaps; but they are not the same at all."

"That is true," he replied. "And I, too, have learned much from your *other* friends. I know that I am no better than my neighbours, and so I do the comfortable classes the justice to be sure that it is only ignorance of the misery that the world holds that keep them from setting it right."

"But should they not have found out about it?" said Fiametta.

"You cannot learn when you don't know that there is anything to learn," said David. "Let them only learn as I

have learned, and it will not be the fear of Socialism, but the love of God's poor, that will make them real Christians. The Socialist may talk of his rights—we have no rights; we have only duties. But we must learn what they are." And then he went on to tell her of his work among the poor, knowing the happiness it would give her. "You understand," he concluded, "that what I most wish to preach is the holy, and very little believed in, gospel of play. Now you will supply me with a practical illustration. You complain that your health is too weak to allow you to help me much. You are to play, and when the women see, as they shall see, how altogether beautiful and delightful you are, they will say—'Come, too, let us play,' and thus the gospel shall be preached."

"But you don't want everybody to play?" she asked.

"Yes, I do."

“But people must work; it is their duty to work.”

“Man being so lamentably short of his high calling—which is to play, and be beautiful—perhaps people ought to work to a certain extent; but work cannot be the object of life, only the means to attain an end, and that end, I maintain, is play. I remember putting it poetically in my childhood as lying on the grass and eating apples all day. Just what Adam and Eve did, only substitute bananas for apples. Eating apples brought them no good.”

“But you work,” she said, rather puzzled; “why, you work a great deal.”

“Because I want others to play. I shall take you about with me as the practical illustration, just as at some temperance meetings they are said to keep a tame drunkard to show as an awful example. I shall show you for a beautiful example. All the women will be raving to be like you.”

His words were light, but there was a steadfast purpose in his face, and a deep shining in his eyes that showed how earnest he was at heart. She read him then as she had failed to read him in the early days of their friendship. Moreover, the high qualities that she saw in him now had been undeveloped then. He saw her look, and he knew what it meant. Raising her hand to his lips, he said gravely—

“For the poor and suffering we give our lives to be freely spent.”

THE END.





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